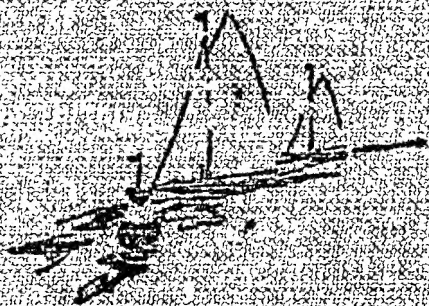


THE  
RED RIVER  
INSURRECTION

Its Causes  
and Events





*The*  
RED RIVER  
INSURRECTION

ITS CAUSES  
AND EVENTS



By  
ERWIN E. KREUTZWEISER

PRINTED BY  
THE GARDEN CITY PRESS  
GARDENVILLE, QUE.

*This book is dedicated  
with affection to  
my Mother*



## PREFACE

This essay is a study of the causes and events of the insurrection commonly known as the Red River Rebellion. It is an independent piece of work, done as far as possible from the original sources. The author wishes, however, to express his indebtedness to certain specialists in the field. He is particularly indebted to Alexander Begg, whose fair-minded treatment of the subject in the first volume of his "History of the North-West" must mark the starting point for any study of the insurrection. The author is also under obligation to Professor Chester Martin, who has made an admirable condensation of the story of the rebellion in volume XIX of the "Canada and Its Provinces" series, and to Professor Arthur S. Morton, who from the depths of his knowledge and penetrating insight offered the author several criticisms and suggestions. Needless to say, the responsibility for the accuracy of the work and for the opinions expressed in the essay is the author's alone.

An explanation is necessary concerning the abbreviations used for the names of certain works. Throughout the essay in the footnotes the "Correspondence Relating to the Recent Disturbances in the Red River Settlement," which was presented to the British Parliament in 1870, is referred to as "B.D.," standing for British Documents. The "Correspondence and Papers Connected with the Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories," presented to the Canadian Parliament, is referred to as "C.D.," standing for Canadian Documents. The documents are the same in both books, except for a few extra ones in the Canadian Documents, but the order of their appearance in the British Documents made it more convenient to use than the Canadian collection.

The "Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territory in 1869-70"

is referred to as "Causes of Difficulties." Alexander Begg's "Journal of the Red River Settlement, 1869-70" is referred to as the "Journal." Professor Morton's collection from the Canadian Archives of Sir John A. Macdonald's letters written by him in connection with the North-West in 1869-70 are "Letter Book 13." The "Preliminary Investigation and Trial of Ambroise D. Lepine for the Murder of Thomas Scott" is called the "Trial of Lepine."

With regard to the dates in the work, since the events of the insurrection occurred in the year 1869-70, the year number has been omitted in all dates referring to that period. If the month is September or later, it refers to 1869; if it is January to August, it refers to 1870.

In the footnotes, since there are numerous cross-references, it was decided to use the abbreviation "v.i." for vide infra and "v.s." for vide supra.

In copying documents, alterations were made towards modernization of the punctuation and capitalization. Fifty years ago writers strewed commas and capital letters here and there. The modern tendency is to minimize the use of commas and capitals, and since this facilitates reading, it was done in this essay whenever documentary material was copied. No other changes, except ellipses (which are indicated), have been made in the documents.



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## INTRODUCTION

The story of the Red River Insurrection is the story of a crisis in Canadian history. The crisis came at the beginning of a period of expansion. Confederation had been achieved, and Canadian statesmen of vision were planning to enlarge the Dominion to include the Great West. Unfortunately, it happened that they did not take steps to make their vision and plan a reality in the proper manner. The Canadian government suddenly found itself faced with a difficult problem. The solution of this problem involved many difficulties, and its events formed the basis of much Canadian history in the period following.

For its intrinsic interest and for its historic significance the Red River Insurrection is a topic of importance. In the following account the insurrection has been treated both from the local viewpoint of the North-West and from the national viewpoint of Canada.

This essay is essentially a story, and as such it hardly has a thesis, but if there may be a thesis stated, it is, as worded in the conclusion, that "the Red River Insurrection was an unfortunate affair which might easily have been averted but which was caused by mistakes on the part of the Dominion government and which, once begun, was complicated by a series of mistakes on the part of both the Canadian representatives and the insurgent leaders." It is also part of the thesis, as further stated in the conclusion, that the rising was illegal and rebellious," but that "the verdict of history must uphold the justice of the Métis' stand."



# THE RED RIVER INSURRECTION



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## CHAPTER ONE

### A Crisis in the North-West

On October 30, 1869, Honorable William McDougall arrived at Pembina, Dakota Territory, en route to Fort Garry to make preparations for assuming his official duties as Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories as soon as the North-West was transferred to Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company. At the customs office he was met by a half-breed who thrust into his hands a slip of paper and disappeared without a word. Busily engaged in moving his goods through the customs, McDougall paid no attention to the note. The customs having been cleared, he proceeded to the Hudson's Bay Company's post two miles from Pembina, within the North-West Territory. On the way he read the contents of the note:<sup>1</sup>

Daté à St. Norbert, Rivière Rouge,  
Ce 21ème jour d'octobre, 1869.

Monsieur:

Le Comité National des Métis de la Rivière Rouge intime à Monsieur Wm. McDougall l'ordre de ne pas entrer sur le territoire du Nord-Ouest sans une permission spéciale de ce Comité.

Par ordre du Président John Bruce.  
Louis Riel, Secrétaire.<sup>2</sup>

A Monsieur McDougall

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<sup>1</sup> McDougall to Howe, Oct. 31; B. D. p. 4

<sup>2</sup> B. D., p. 8

What attention did McDougall pay to this letter? What inkling did he have of the events that were transpiring along the Red River? On his way from St. Paul to Pembina he had met Hon. Joseph Howe, who was returning from a brief stay in the Red River Settlement. Due to the storm that was raging, McDougall had only a very brief interview with Howe. The latter intimated that, while the people as a whole were well-disposed towards the Canadian government, the feelings of a certain section of the population had been excited and that delicate handling would be necessary to allay them. No mention was made of the possibility of an armed insurrection.<sup>3</sup>

Thirty miles east of Pembina, McDougall met one Sanford of Hamilton, Ontario, who turned over to him despatches from Colonel Dennis, Canadian officer directing the governmental survey in the Territory, from William Cowan, chief magistrate of the settlement, and from William McTavish, Governor for the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>4</sup>

Sanford informed McDougall that he had been impeded by a band of armed men at Scratching River, about fifteen miles from Fort Garry. They had thrown a barricade across the road and expressed their determination to prevent the Canadian representative from proceeding to Fort Garry. He fully believed that they would carry out their intention.

The despatch from Colonel Dennis contained an account of the opposition developing among the French half-breeds to the government surveys which Dennis was conducting, of the active efforts put forth by the Métis to stop them,<sup>5</sup> and of the preparations to prevent the entry of the new governor into the territory.

<sup>3</sup> McDougall to Howe, Oct. 31; loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *vide infra*, p. 25



The note from Governor McTavish was one written to Dennis. The Governor stated, "Matters, from information that has reached me, look serious, but it is very difficult judging of affairs of this kind here, and sometimes when the case looks bad, the whole thing subsides. I have seen too many difficulties here got over quietly to despair until the worst has taken place, but I must allow there are incidents in the present case that have not been in former troubles."<sup>6</sup>

It will be seen that McDougall, at the time of his arrival at Pembina, must have had a clear idea that there was a definite feeling of unrest among a portion of the settlers. Possibly he considered that when he arrived at Fort Garry he could make a personal settlement of the trouble. Little did he realize the magnitude of the discontent and the stubborn determination of resistance to Canadian rule which had developed among the French portion of the settlement. This was soon to be impressed forcibly upon him.

Informed of the situation as he was, McDougall cautiously decided not to advance himself and risk the indignity of a repulse, but to send ahead his secretary, J. A. N. Provencher, to deliver a message to Governor McTavish, claiming his protection for the incoming party, and to ascertain through friendly conference with the Insurgents their object and their strength. McDougall was not prepared to treat with the Insurgents on equal terms for Provencher was instructed to explain to them that so long as they remained armed he could not officially communicate with them.

Provencher was sent back from the barricade with escort. Captain Cameron, a member of McDougall's party, who set out for Fort Garry on his own responsibility, was returned along with Provencher.

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<sup>6</sup> McDougall to Howe, Oct. 31; loc. cit.

On the second of November a band of armed half-breeds galloped up to the Hudson's Bay post and demanded an interview with McDougall. Two of the leaders were admitted to McDougall's presence and informed him that he must depart from the Territory. McDougall asked who had sent them, to which they replied, "The Government." "What government?" asked McDougall, and they answered, "The government we have made,"<sup>7</sup> and gave the McDougall party until nine o'clock the next morning to depart. On the following morning the party of Métis appeared at the gate of the post and clamorously demanded McDougall's departure, declaring that after nine o'clock they would not be responsible for the lives of the party. Faced with obvious violent danger, McDougall considered discretion the better part of valor and beat a retreat to Pembina, there to "wait the issue of events."<sup>8</sup>

On the very day that McDougall was ordered to leave the Territory, dramatic events occurred in the Settlement. Louis Riel, with a party of one hundred men, approached Fort Garry on the road from Rivière Sale, entered the open gates, and proceeded to billet his party in the houses within the walls. Dr. Cowan, the officer in charge, protested, asking, "What do you want here with all these armed men?" Riel replied, "We have come to guard the Fort." "Against whom?" asked Dr. Cowan. "Against a danger," Riel answered.<sup>9</sup>

Safely and comfortably ensconced in a powerful fort, abundantly supplied with arms and ammunition, in possession of all the provisions of the Hudson's Bay Com-

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<sup>7</sup> The Métis had organized a committee, but really had not yet organized a government. The provisional government was not established until the 24th; v. i., p. 87

<sup>8</sup> McDougall to Howe, Oct. 31; loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup> McTavish to McDougall, Nov. 9; B. D., p. 38

pany, the Insurgents became, by this coup, masters of the situation. McDougall was in retirement at Pembina, and Governor McTavish was seriously ill in bed and helpless to alter the situation. The rising had begun in earnest.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Background: Canadian Transfer Preparations

How did this insurrection originate? What were the causes behind it, and what were its objectives? To answer these questions, first we must briefly go back and review certain tendencies and events of the previous decade.

In the Red River Settlement there had been an appreciable influx of Canadians who were not satisfied with Company rule and who supplied a leaven of political discontent. A petition for union with Canada, signed by nearly 600 persons, was submitted in 1856 to the Canadian parliament. The "Nor-Wester," established in 1859, persistently agitated against the "miserable state of serfdom," the "wavering do-nothing policy of the imperial government," and the dilatory and unrespected courts of the Company; and it continually urged union with Canada.<sup>1</sup>

In Canada itself, interest in the North-West was growing. The Toronto "Globe," for instance, was reiterating vociferously Canada's claim to this region. "Do the Hudson's Bay Company think they can shut out people from the direct road to the Great West forever?" asked George Brown in 1856.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, Hon.

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<sup>1</sup> "Canada and its Provinces," vol. XIX p. 59

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* 60

Van Koughnet, president of the executive council, declared at a public meeting that he sought a boundary for Canada on the Pacific Ocean, that no charter could give to a body of men control over half a continent, and that he would not rest until that charter was abolished.<sup>3</sup>

In the following year, a parliamentary committee reported it advisable that "the districts on the Red River and the Saskatchewan" should be "ceded to Canada on equitable principles."<sup>4</sup> When Cartier, Ross, and Galt visited England in 1858 in connection with the Hudson's Bay question, they gave the British government to understand that steps would be taken to test the validity of the charter. This plan, however, was relinquished by the Canadian executive. The Company was not deprived of its charter in 1859; instead, it was renewed.

The question of the acquisition of the North-West remained in abeyance from the standpoint of the Canadian government for some time, but nevertheless it continued as a matter of public interest and discussion. Then, in the spring of 1865, a delegation again discussed the Canadian claims with the British government, and definite steps might have been taken but for the fact that a confederation was pending.<sup>5</sup>

The British North America Act of 1867 provided for the extension of the Dominion of Canada by the inclusion of the North-West. Article XI, sec. 146, reads as follows:

It shall be lawful for the Queen, by and with the advice of Her Majesty's Most Honorable Privy Council, etc., on addresses from the houses of parliament of Canada, to admit Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory, or either of them, into the

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<sup>3</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," vol. 1, p. 330

<sup>4</sup> "Canada and its Provinces," vol. 19, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60

union, on such terms and conditions in each case as are in the addresses expressed, and as the Queen thinks fit to approve, subject to the provisions of this Act."

In accordance with this arrangement, William McDougall introduced in the first session of the Canadian parliament in 1867 a series of resolutions requesting the imperial government to unite Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories with Canada:

1. That it would promote the prosperity of the Canadian people, and conduce to the advantage of the whole empire, if the Dominion of Canada, constituted under the provisions of the British North America Act, 1867, were extended westward to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

2. That colonization of the lands of the Saskatchewan, Assiniboia, and Red River settlements, and the development of the mineral wealth which abounds in the regions of the North-West, and the extension of commercial intercourse through the British possessions in America from the Atlantic to the Pacific, are alike dependent upon the establishment of a stable government, for maintenance of law and order in the North-West Territories.

3. That the welfare of the sparse and widely scattered population of British subjects of European origin, already inhabiting these remote and unorganized territories, would be materially enhanced by the formation therein of political institutions

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\* 30 & 31 Victoria, C. 3; Kennedy, W. P. M., "Documents of the Canadian Constitution," p. 683; and Oliver, E. H. (ed.) "The Canadian North-West," p. 871

bearing analogy, as far as circumstances will admit to those which exist in the several provinces of this Dominion.

4. That the 146th section of the British North America Act, 1867, provides for the admission of Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory, or either of them, into union with Canada, upon terms and conditions to be expressed in addresses from the houses of parliament of this Dominion to Her Majesty, and which shall be approved of by the Queen in Council.

5. That it is accordingly expedient to address Her Majesty that she would be graciously pleased, by and with the advice of her most honorable Privy Council, to unite Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory with the Dominion of Canada, and to grant to the parliament of Canada authority to legislate for their future welfare and good government.

6. That in the event of the imperial government agreeing to transfer to Canada the jurisdiction and control over this region, it would be expedient to provide that the legal rights of any corporation, company, or individual, within the same, will be respected; and that in case of difference of opinion as to the extent, nature, or value of these rights, the same shall be submitted to judicial decision, or be determined by mutual agreement between the government of Canada and the parties interested. Such (sic) agreement to have no effect or validity until sanctioned by the parliament of Canada.

7. That upon the transference of the territories in question to the Canadian government, the claims of

the Indian tribes to compensation for lands required for purposes of settlement, would be considered and settled in conformity with the equitable principles which uniformly governed the Crown in its dealings with the aborigines.

8. That a select committee be appointed to draft an humble address to Her Majesty on the subject of the foregoing resolutions.<sup>7</sup>

In 1868 the imperial parliament passed enabling legislation making possible an arrangement with the Company.<sup>8</sup> Cartier and McDougall accordingly were appointed a commission to negotiate with the Company and the imperial government. By the spring of 1869 a settlement had been arrived at.

The terms of the transfer provided for the surrender of Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories to the imperial government and later to Canada, the payment by Canada of £300,000 to the Company, the confirmation of titles granted to the Company, certain small areas for Company forts, and the right for fifty years to one twentieth of all land settled in the "fertile belt," which lies between the United States, the Rocky Mountains, the North Saskatchewan River, and the chain of water connecting Lake Winnipeg with Lake of the Woods. The transfer was to take place on or as near October 1, 1869, as possible.<sup>9</sup>

During the session of 1869, parliament made provision for borrowing \$1,460,000 to purchase the Territory from the Company, and passed an Act providing for a territorial government. This government was to consist of a lieutenant-governor appointed by the govern-

<sup>7</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 342-3; and Oliver, E. H., op. cit. p. 945

<sup>8</sup> "Rupert's Land Act," (31-32 Victoria, Chap. 105), Oliver, E. H., op. cit., p. 937

<sup>9</sup> Oliver, E. H., op. cit., p. 955 et seq.



or-general-in-council, and a council of not less than seven and not more than fifteen members appointed by the governor-in-council.<sup>10</sup>

In July of 1869, Colonel J. S. Dennis was commissioned by McDougall to make plans for surveying the Red River district. Dennis submitted a report suggesting a method of survey and also intimating that there was a possibility of objections on the part of the French half-breeds to any survey until their claims had been investigated and settled by the Dominion Government. No attention seems to have been paid to Dennis' information, and; after cabinet approval, he was instructed on October 4, to proceed with the survey.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the date of the transfer was postponed from October 1 to on or about December 1.<sup>12</sup> On September 28, McDougall was appointed to be lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories from and after the day on which the Territories were transferred to the Dominion. His commission was as follows:

To the Honorable William McDougall, of the city of Ottawa, in the province of Ontario, in our Dominion of Canada, member of our Privy Council for Canada, and Companion of our most honorable Order of the Bath, greeting:

Whereas by an Act of parliament of Canada, made and passed in the session held in the thirty-second and thirty-third years of our reign, and intitled:

'An Act for the temporary government of Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory when

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<sup>10</sup> Gunn, D. and Tuttle, C. R., "History of Manitoba," p. 334

<sup>11</sup> v. s., p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Macdonald to Carroll, Sept. 29; Macdonald Papers, Letter Book No. 13, p. 209; and Young to Granville, Aug. 25; B. D., p. 1

united with Canada." After reciting that it is probable that We, pursuant to the British North America Act, 1867, may be pleased to admit Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory into the Union or Dominion of Canada before the then next session of the Canadian parliament, and further reciting that it is expedient to prepare for the transfer of the said territories from the local territories to the government of Canada at the time which may be appointed by us for such admission, and to make some temporary provision for the civil government of such territories until more permanent arrangements can be made by the government and legislature of Canada. It is by the said Act now in recital in effect enacted that it shall be lawful for our governor, by any order or orders to be by him from time to time made with the advice of the Privy Council and subject to such conditions and restrictions as to him shall seem meet, to authorize such officer as he may from time to time appoint as lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories, to make provision for the administration of justice therein, and generally to make, ordain, and establish all such laws, institutions, and ordinances as may be necessary for the peace, order, and good government of our subjects and others therein, and it also further enacted, that the lieutenant-governor shall administer the government under instructions given from time to time by order in council.

And whereas for the purpose of preparing for the transfer of the North-West Territories aforesaid to the government of Canada, at the time which may be appointed by us for such admission, and for making some temporary provision for the civil government of such territories, we are desirous of appoint-

ing you, the said William McDougall, to be lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories.

Now know ye that we, reposing special trust and confidence in the prudence, courage, loyalty, and integrity of you, the said William McDougall, of our special grace, certain knowledge, and mere notion have thought fit to constitute and appoint you on, from, and after the day to be named by us for the admission of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory into the union or Dominion of Canada, to be, during our pleasure, lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories aforesaid, and We do hereby authorize and empower, and require and command you on, from, and after the day to be so named by us. . . in due manner to do and execute in all things that shall belong to your said command, and the trust we have reposed in you, according to the several provisions and instructions granted or appointed you by this Our commission, and of the Act herein before recited, according to such instructions as are herewith given to you, or which may from time to time be given you in respect of the North-West Territories aforesaid, and the government thereof, by order of Our governor-general in council, under the sign manual of Our said governor-general or by us through one of Our Privy Council of Canada, and according to such laws as are or shall be enforced within the North-West Territories.

In testimony whereof, etc.

By command,

Hector Langevin,  
Secretary of State.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> C. D., p. 4-5

A letter from the secretary of state for the provinces was also sent McDougall, instructing him to proceed to Fort Garry, make preliminary investigations, and report to the government at Ottawa. "I am to instruct you," the letter ran, "to proceed with all convenient speed to Fort Garry, in order that you may effectually superintend the carrying out of the preliminary arrangements indicated in the preceding paragraph, and be ready to assume the government of the Territories on their actual transfer to Canada." McDougall was to offer seats on the council to McTavish and Black, and to submit to Ottawa the names of several residents qualified to act as councillors. He was to report on the state of laws and the method of administering justice, the system of taxation and licensing, the state of the Indians, the nature and amount of currency in circulation, the system of education (if any) which existed, and such lands as it might be desirable to open for settlement.<sup>14</sup>

Concerning all these vital and important things the Canadian government were ignorant — at the time when they expected to take over the Territory! This admirably illustrates the deplorable lack of foresight on the part of the Canadian government with regard to the transfer of the North-West. We shall not be long in discovering other evidence, equally admirable and equally deplorable.

Early in October the lieutenant-governor-elect set out for the North-West, only, as we have seen, to be stopped at the American boundary.

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<sup>14</sup> Langevin to McDougall, Sept. 28; B. D., p. 2-3

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Background:

#### Situation on the Red River

The arrangement of the transfer was received with mingled feelings in the Settlement. First of all, resident Hudson's Bay Company officials were incensed at the transfer. They had been ignored entirely in the negotiations. No part of the proceeds were expected to accrue to them. Consequently they were disinterested in the success of the project. They had not been consulted or advised of the change by the Canadian government. Their chief source of information was the newspapers. Therefore, they were either unable to or they took no trouble to explain to the people the terms of the transfer or the intentions of the Canadian statesmen.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, there is some ground for believing that these officials abetted the disaffection and resistance to the transfer which developed. Color is lent this theory by the inaction displayed in opposing the insurrection.<sup>2</sup> Support is also lent by a letter from W. B. O'Donohue, one of the insurgent leaders, addressed to the speaker of the House of Commons in 1875. In this letter O'Donohue said:

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen to Macdonald, Dec. 6; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> v. i., p. 31 et seq.

I make the following statement of facts, which I can prove most conclusively:

The insurrection was advised by Governor William McTavish, who, with other officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, also aided and abetted it from its inception up to the very hour it ceased to exist.<sup>3</sup> That Riel was constantly in communication with Governor McTavish, and on many occasions under his instructions. That he, Governor McTavish, fully recognized the provisional government. That Donald A. Smith, on arriving at Fort Garry, recognized the government also in my hearing,<sup>4</sup> and with Governor McTavish was Riel's adviser during his stay in the Fort, and after the departure of both these men from the country, Riel continued to hold counsel with John McTavish, who then represented the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>5</sup>

From the nature of O'Donohue's character, his word is not to be taken at face value; and from the evidence as a whole, it seems fair to say that the Company, while it did little to arrest the rebellion, did not voluntarily and wilfully abet it. The stand of the Company officials was one of apathy more than anything else.

Among the English-speaking residents there were some who were willing, even anxious, to accept the new order of things. These were chiefly the Canadian immigrants. Their position was clearly stated by the "Nor-Wester," which had continuously flayed the Company rule, and which opposed the insurgents and upheld McDougall and the government of Canada. On September 7, 1869, it declared editorially:

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<sup>3</sup> A factual error. McTavish left the Settlement on May 17, and the rebellion did not collapse until August 24.

<sup>4</sup> Denied by Smith; v. i., p. 112

<sup>5</sup> Gunn, D. and Tuttle, C. R., op. cit., p. 353-

In the Toronto "Globe" of July 20th, and in the "Leader" of the same place, of Aug. 15th, we notice articles relative to the Government about to be established in this Territory; and whilst the one journal being in the opposition, can see no good as likely to "come out of Nazareth" and fears that something will be perpetrated which will be highly dissatisfactory to the people of this colony; the other journal believes that all will be right. The "Globe" is indignant and sorry that some system of representation had not been provided at the outstart, that this people might have participated in the appointment of their own public men, and sees nothing in the "Act for providing a government for the North-West" to prevent the lieutenant-governor from bringing all his officials with him. The "Leader" on the other hand thinks Red River will be consulted so far as to have two of the Council appointed here, and that such a course will be highly pleasing to all parties throughout every section of the Dominion.

For our part we believe that both journals are wrong, and that a satisfactory means will be devised by the Ottawa cabinet which will not only secure the interest and influence of the different provinces in the government of the North-West, but will at the same time give this colony a full representation in its own council.

As for the "Act" which was passed for our governance near the close of the last sitting of parliament, we have no particular fault to find with it, inasmuch as it is intended to be only temporary in character, and may be abrogated within a twelve month. What more could parliament have done in the premises? We had no one to represent us in

Ottawa, and as they knew nothing of our political position, other than that we were in a state of semi-vassalage under a powerful monopoly, nothing but a temporary provision could have been made until our real condition should be known.<sup>6</sup>

Many American settlers were opposed to a union with Canada, and they received support from French Canadians who distrusted Canada. The inclinations of these persons lay towards the United States, which was so near them, rather than towards Canada, which could be reached only through American territory. Nevertheless, the Americans in the Settlement did not support the insurrection when it came. The American support for the rising was given by persons from across the boundary line.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the English and Scotch had hoped for the establishment of a crown colony with responsible government, or even preferred to remain under Company rule rather than become "a mere sub-colony of a colony."<sup>8</sup> Now that they were to be taken over by a real authority, many settlers saw virtues in the Company rule. This feeling is expressed by Alexander Begg in his "Journal of the Red River Settlement." He severely criticizes the "Nor-Wester's" pro-Canadian and anti-Company activities, and declares that they were "intended to lead the public of Canada and the rest of the world to suppose that we were a people tyrannized over and that we were eagerly seeking for a milder and more generous government to step in and free us from our thralldom," and he adds, "Now, such was never the case. Whatever may have been the faults of the Hudson Bay rule, they were light ones, and although there was a feeling in the minds

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<sup>6</sup> Morton, A. S. (ed.) "Nor-Wester," New Series.

<sup>7</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 15

<sup>8</sup> "Canada and its Provinces," vol. 19, p. 61



of the settlers that the Hudson's Bay Company were not powerful enough to enforce the laws when required, yet there never was a general feeling of discontent towards them or their actions in the government of the settlement. On the contrary, we felt ourselves a free people; in every respect we had privileges that in other countries were not enjoyed by the people."<sup>9</sup> Although this laudatory opinion of the Company's rule was probably colored by a dislike for the editor of the "Nor-Wester," it is a fair and accurate statement.<sup>10</sup>

Particularly did the French and Métis fear a change. In this they were led by the Roman Catholic clergy, who dreaded lest a change from the *status quo* would weaken their influence and power. Bishop Taché wrote in 1868 in a booklet entitled, "A Sketch of the North-West of America":

'In the colony there is nervousness and uneasiness about the future. Some who hope to gain by any change are clamorous for one; others dwelling more upon the system of government than upon its application, would like to try a change, certain that they would never return to the primitive state from which they desired to escape; a greater number — the majority — dread that change. Many are very reasonable; the country might gain much by that change, and it would certainly obtain many advantages which it now lacks; but the existing population would certainly be the losers. As we love the people more than the land in which they live, as we prefer the well-being of the former to the splendor of the latter, we now repeat that, for our population we very much dread some of the proposed changes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 3-4

<sup>10</sup> "Canada and its Provinces," loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> quoted in Gunn, D., op. cit.

The French element suspected that their interests would be sacrificed in union with Canada. They resented possible encroachments on the freedom of their religion and language. Bishop Taché, while in Ottawa in June, 1869, en route to the ecumenical council in Rome, warned the Government of the necessity of a definite recognition of the French language and the Roman Catholic religion in the West.<sup>12</sup>

Especially were the half-breeds opposed to the transfer. They had been consulted in no way,<sup>13</sup> many of them held land in questionable tenure, and they feared for the security of their property.<sup>14</sup> They resented the incursion of a foreign government and they disputed the right of the Dominion government to take possession of what they considered their country without their consent.<sup>15</sup> They entertained the same fears with regard to their religion as did the French.<sup>16</sup>

The Métis had been accustomed to a wild and free life. The situation with regard to them, when analyzed, is seen to be that of a wild and untrammelled ethos ranged in stubborn resistance to an alien, stable ethos; and a religion, traditionally conditioned in this country to fear responses, prepared to resist the least sign of danger.

The causes of discontent and unrest among the Métis that we have noticed in the foregoing were based on feelings and emotions that are deeply rooted in human nature — desire to maintain the status quo and fear of change, fear of the unknown, a sense of individuality and a hatred of being treated without consideration, possess-

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<sup>12</sup> "Canada and its Provinces," loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup> McTavish, J. H., evidence in "Cause of Difficulties," p. 1

<sup>14</sup> Bown's evidence, *ibid.*, p. 113; and Bunn's evidence, *ibid.*, p. 115

<sup>15</sup> Dennis to McDougall, Oct. 12; B. D., p. 6

<sup>16</sup> The evidence for the statements in this paragraph are abundant in "Cause of Difficulties," Smith's "Report," the "Report" of Father Thibault, Begg's "Journal."

iveness and the dread of losing what one owns. Another elemental feeling entered into the situation — personal pride and resentment of contemptuous treatment.

This was undoubtedly one of the most important factors in the insurrection. And the responsibility for it lies mainly with the Canadian party in the settlement. This group was small but vociferous, — tactlessly and impolitely vociferous. Alexander Begg in his "Journal" continually refers to the rash, ill-considered, and domineering words and actions of the Canadians. Dr. Schultz, huge and overbearing as he was, seems especially to have been disliked by the populace. James Ross was reputedly a drunken busybody. Others of the party followed their lead. The Bishop of Rupert's Land when in Ottawa spoke "in the most disparaging sense of them" and "all the respectability of the North-West" was of the same opinion.<sup>17</sup>

Canadians who came to the Settlement fell into the hands of this group and became contaminated with their reputation. Thus did surveyors Snow and Mair, who came to the Settlement in 1868 under instructions from McDougall to lay out a road from Fort Garry to the Lake of the Woods. Whether acting in imitation of Schultz or simply acting natural, they were "exceedingly indiscreet and offensive."<sup>18</sup> In the spring of the following year, Snow was implicated in a transaction to purchase land from the Indians without reference to the claims of the half-breeds, and was seized by a party of settlers and brought to Fort Garry, where he was released only after intercession by Governor McTavish on his behalf.<sup>19</sup> Particularly did Mair incense the Métis with his rudely

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<sup>17</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, Dec. 8; Macdonald Letter Book 13, p. 668

<sup>18</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, Dec. 8; Letter Book 13, loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 6; and evidence of Spence in "Causes of Difficulties," p. 133

humorous reports of the natives and his accounts in the eastern papers of the half-breed maidens and how easy they were to conquer.<sup>20</sup> Dennis, who later was appointed Lieutenant and Conservator of the Peace for McDougall, unwittingly fell into the trap. Instead of dealing with the "respectability," he allowed himself to be taken in by Schultz and became associated definitely with the Canadian party.

The evidence of other persons whose word is good supports this opinion of the Canadian party. Donald A. Smith,<sup>21</sup> McTavish,<sup>22</sup> the correspondents of the Montreal "Herald," the Toronto "Globe," and the St. Paul "Press,"<sup>23</sup> and Rev. I. B. Thibault<sup>24</sup> concurred in this viewpoint. Only such persons as the pious and undiscerning Rev. George Young, who was himself a Canadian, saw that party as "brave, loyal, but badly handled men."<sup>25</sup>

The settlers, both English and French, were suspicious of Canadians and were inclined to wonder, "Can any good thing come out of Canada?"<sup>26</sup> It is easy to see that the residents of the Red River district, and especially the half-breeds, feared the possibilities of rule under such insolent and overbearing persons as were in the Settlement or others who might be like them. This feeling was accentuated when, after the surveyors came,<sup>27</sup> members of the Canadian party staked out large parcels of land which they boasted would be theirs after union with Canada and gloated exultantly in anticipation of the time when

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<sup>20</sup> Begg, A. loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Smith to Macdonald, Jan. 1; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2, p. 371

<sup>22</sup> The Company had continually suffered from the diatribes of the "Nor-Wester." See also "Causes of Difficulties," p. 10

<sup>23</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, Dec. 8; loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Thibault to Langevin, Jan. 8; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2, p. 437

<sup>25</sup> Young, G., "Manitoba Memories," p. 109

<sup>26</sup> Begg, A., loc. cit.

<sup>27</sup> v. s., p. 2 and 11; v. i., p. 24

they would be masters of the country. The half-breeds would know their place then!<sup>28</sup> The Métis were not unintelligent, and they had their sensibilities; they resented bitterly the aspersions cast upon them and the slights to which they were subjected. They keenly understood the attitude in which they were held by the Canadians, and they refused to submit to the treatment that seemed forthcoming.

A peaceful transfer of the Territory to Canada was possible only if wisdom, diplomacy, and tact were exercised by the Canadian government, but that body was blissfully ignorant of the delicacy of the situation. It made almost no effort to quiet the fears or respect the pride of the people. Woefully careless preparations, entirely without consideration of the local interests or desires, were made for effecting the transfer. The Canadian government was so unwise as not to consult the settlers before making arrangements. Bishop Taché while in Ottawa intimated his apprehensions to Cartier, who "said he knew it all a great deal better than I did, and did not want any information."<sup>29</sup> This careless policy, probably due to the inexperience of Canadian statesmen, was one of the saddest errors in Canadian history. Its dire results we shall presently see.

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<sup>28</sup> evidence of Lynch in "Causes of Difficulties," p. 131

<sup>29</sup> Taché's evidence in "Causes of Difficulties," p. 10

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Hostilities Commence

In October of 1869, as we have seen, Col. Dennis was prosecuting his survey work. Dennis apparently acted in a very proper and circumspect manner, giving no one reason to complain at his personal behavior. In an interview with the "Nor-Wester" he publicly explained the policy of the Canadian government. On August 31 that paper reported:

It has been intimated to us that a misapprehension exists in the minds of some of our settlers, especially the native born population, as to the effect of future government surveys with regard to their farms and farm boundaries. As this is a matter of much importance, one, in fact directly affecting the peace and quietness of the settlement, we have made it our business to seek an interview on the subject with Colonel Dennis, the government officer sent forward to take charge of the survey in the Territory. The result of our talk was most satisfactory. Not only does the officer named assure us that his instructions are to respect the grants made by the Company, but that his further duty is to make an accurate survey of these lands as severally occupied with the view of the government giving to the owners proper deeds covering titles. Whatever system may be decided on as to the township surveys, such system will only apply to land not heretofore granted or those unsettled at the present time.

The "Nor-Wester" commented:

This course on the part of the Dominion government shows the determination to respect fully the rights heretofore acquired by settlers under the rule of the Company, and is a guarantee of a sound and just policy in the future administration of land matters in the Territory.

Other persons were not of the same persuasion. Hardly had the survey work begun when the half-breeds attempted, in a blind, cumbrous way to put a summary stop to it.<sup>1</sup> On October 11 a band of seventeen Métis, under the leadership of Louis Riel, interrupted a survey party who were working between townships six and seven. The half-breeds were unarmed, but by standing on the chain and making threats of violence, they succeeded in forcing the surveyors to desist and to retire from the country on the south side of the Assiniboine.

Colonel Dennis presented the matter to Dr. Cowan. In doing so, he questioned, "whether, owing to the unsettled relation of the land tenure regarding the halfbreeds and Indians, and the peculiar irritation or sensitiveness that existed on the part of the French half-breeds in view of the transfer of the Territory and the assumption of the government by Canada, it would be politic to take harsh measures towards the offenders in this case."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Cowan impressed on Riel the seriousness of his offence and endeavored to elicit a promise that no further opposition would be given to the continuance of the survey. To this Riel only replied that the Canadian government had no right to make surveys in the Territory without the express commission of the people of the Settlement.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis to McDougall, October 31; B. D., p. 5-6

The importunities of Dr. Cowan being of no avail, Governor McTavish interviewed Riel, but without success. The Métis leader insisted that injustice was being done by the Canadian government and declined to withdraw from his position.

The Church was then appealed to. Dr. Cowan was sure that Father Lestanc, in charge of the diocese during the absence of Bishop Taché, could end the opposition — if he were so disposed. But Father Lestanc was not so disposed. Since the half-breeds believed that the Company was in collusion with the government of Canada, he said, any attempt to influence them from their position would lead them to believe that the Church also was in sympathy with the government, and thus the influence of the clergy would be weakened.

All of which, of course, was evasive deception. Wise leadership and counsel from the Church in this crisis could have averted the unfortunate disasters which later occurred. From the action — or inaction — of the clergy during the uprising we can only conclude that, if they did not actively abet the insurgents, they at least gave tacit consent to their deeds. Of course, they did not see why they should help a government which had ignored their wishes to install itself among them. The fear of the proposed change and the opposition to the transfer on the part of the Catholic Church may well be understood and sympathized with. Nevertheless, since the Church was so palpably the counsellor and leader of the Métis, it should have planned and conducted a wiser and more discreet course of action than it did.

Dr. Cowan was obliged to inform Dennis that he had failed to overcome the Métis' opposition to the survey. "I believe that they are now of the opinion that we are influenced unduly in favor of the Canadian government,



so that it is in vain for us to have any further conferences with them at present," he reported.<sup>2</sup>

Dennis' action in this matter is very much subject to severe criticism. In the first place, he was staying in the Territory only on the goodwill of the local government; and in the second place, his survey had no support in legality. He was an agent of the Canadian government and that government had no authority in the Territory. The most reasonable and wisest thing that Dennis could have done was to leave the country and join his chief.

This and other actions of Dennis in the crisis are of importance in studying the Red River insurrection. Had McDougall been represented by a saner and more diplomatic person, many of the unfortunate incidents of the uprising might have been averted. In fact, a wise representative of Canada might have dispelled opposition to and inspired confidence in Canadian rule, might have arranged a conference between McDougall and Riel, might have cleverly worn down Riel's support by judicious explanations and promises — all this without deviating from strict truth and honorable activity. What Canada needed in the Settlement was a respected and suave diplomat. What it had was something very different. Macdonald estimated the man at his worth when he wrote:

The course taken by Stoughton Dennis in pressing for strong measures to be taken against parties interfering with his survey was exceedingly injudicious. He is a very decent fellow and a good surveyor and all that, but he has got no head, and is exceedingly fussy. He was in the country simply on sufferance, in anticipation of its future transfer to Canada. On finding any serious dissatisfaction

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<sup>2</sup> Cowan to Dennis, October 15; B. D., p. 7

amongst the natives or residents, he should have at once struck work and awaited your arrival."<sup>3</sup>

While these stirring events were occurring, the Settlement received a visit from no less a distinguished person than Hon. Joseph Howe, who was then president of the Council. He arrived on October 9 and remained until the 18th.<sup>4</sup> Howe visited the region in the capacity of a private citizen who wished to study the country with the view of better understanding it when he assumed the office of secretary of state for the provinces for which he was slated. Declining invitations of Canadians to be their guest, he remained a good deal in his hotel and received a steady stream of visitors. He made no public utterances, but travelled once or twice up and down the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Howe apparently made assurances to those with whom he came in contact that "Canada would do justice in all cases,"<sup>5</sup> but there appears no statement of such a declaration in the "Nor-Wester," which journal with its pro-Canadian sentiments, one would think, would have secured a colorful story from the visitor.

Howe's reputation as a person of rebellious nature seems to have given to some the impression that he sympathized with the French-Canadians in their complaints,<sup>6</sup> but his own statement reads:

During my visit to the Red River, I never saw Riel, Bruce, Father Ritchot, or any persons said to be the leaders of the insurrectionary movement, but I conversed freely with all classes and orders of the people, from Governor McTavish downwards, and to them all held the same language: That the same

<sup>3</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, November 20; Letter Book 13, p. 479

<sup>4</sup> "Nor-Wester," October 26

<sup>5</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," vol. p. 380

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

constitution as the other provinces possessed would ultimately be conferred upon the country, that in the provisional arrangements to be made the feelings and interests of the resident population would be considered, that leading men enjoying their confidence would be at once taken into the service, as they were fitted by education, to fill places of trust and emolument.<sup>7</sup>

This very statement, however, stands as a severe indictment of Howe and his government. He did nothing to allay the fears and suspicions of the Métis. The incident of Howe's visit is illustrative of the carelessness of the Canadian government in dealing with the North-West at this time. Knowing that Howe was going to visit the Settlement which Canada hoped shortly to take over, Macdonald might have instructed him to make official announcements and declarations of policy. No trace of such instruction is found in Macdonald's letter. That this was not done is one of the gravest errors of Macdonald's career.

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<sup>7</sup> Howe to McDougall, Dec. 11; B. D., p. 51

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Métis Organize to Exclude McDougall

The time for the expected arrival of McDougall was approaching, and preparations were made in the Settlement. In St. Andrew's Parish a meeting was held on October 19, and an address of welcome drawn up by Donald Gunn was approved.<sup>1</sup> The "kindly, loyal, and patriotic sentiments" embodied therein were dissented to by only a very few of the persons present. Similar preparations were put on foot in other parishes.

At the same time, preparations for a different sort of welcome were being made in another part of the Settlement. On the 20th a number of the disaffected French party met at the home of John Bruce, a French half-breed, formed a provisional committee, and decided to send an armed party to meet McDougall, whom they expected to arrive on the 22nd.<sup>2</sup>

On the day following the meeting, an armed group of approximately forty men gathered at the crossing of Rivière Sale, between Fort Garry and Pembina. The men, who were billeted in adjacent houses, were under instructions to turn back the would-be governor or, if he persisted in crossing, to shoot him. Another party of about twenty

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<sup>1</sup> "Nor-Wester," October 26

<sup>2</sup> Dennis to McDougall, October 31; R. D., p. 6

men, under Riel himself, was near the border on Scratch-  
ing River<sup>3</sup> for the same purpose. A third group of some  
forty men was stationed between the two groups. If Mc-  
Dougall persisted in advancing, these parties would fall  
back to the River Salé and take final action<sup>4</sup>.

The same day, as we have seen, a messenger was des-  
patched to McDougall with a warning not to attempt to  
enter the Settlement.

When the news of the organization of these armed  
parties reached Fort Garry, Dennis and a Turner who  
had accompanied Howe on his visit informed Judge Black  
of the insurgents' intentions. The judge conferred with  
McTavish and the latter decided to call a council meet-  
ing for the 25th. The meeting was held as arranged.<sup>5</sup>  
Bishop Machray, representative of the Anglican Church  
on the council, contended that the movement had no sanc-  
tion from the governor and council and was in plain  
terms a rebellion, and urged that an armed force be  
raised summarily to suppress the rising. This policy was  
not adopted; the council considered that the affair could  
be settled amicably and preferred to negotiate peaceably  
with the "rebels."<sup>6</sup>

The insurgent leaders had been invited to the meeting,  
and, following out this policy, the council endeavored to  
persuade them to desist from their program, but with-  
out success. The minutes of the meeting read:

Mr. Riel . . . said that his party were perfectly sat-  
isfied with the present government and wanted no  
other; that they objected to any governor coming  
from Canada without their being consulted in the  
matter; that they would never admit any governor,

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<sup>3</sup> v. s., p. 2

<sup>4</sup> B. D., p. 7

<sup>5</sup> The minutes are given in B. D., p. 184

<sup>6</sup> Machray, R., "Life of Archbishop Machray," p. 175-6

no matter by whom he might be appointed, if not by the Hudson's Bay Company, unless delegates were previously sent, with whom they might negotiate as to the terms and conditions under which they would acknowledge him; that they were uneducated, and only half-civilized, and felt that if a large immigration were to take place, they would probably be crowded out of a country which they were in a sense, poor and insignificant, but that it was just because they were aware of their insignificance that they had felt so much at being treated as if they were more insignificant than they in reality were; that their existence, or at least their wishes, had been entirely ignored; that if Mr. McDougall were once here, most probably the English-speaking population would allow him to be installed in office as governor, and then he would be "our master or king," as he says, and that, therefore, they intended to send him back; that they consider they are acting, not only for their own good, but also for the good of the whole Settlement; that they did not feel that they were breaking the law, but were simply acting in defence of their own liberty; and that they were determined to prevent Mr. McDougall from coming into the Settlement at all hazards.

William Dease, "loyalist" French-Canadian member of the council led a group of about eighty passive French in a conference with the insurgents. He remonstrated with and appealed to them, but unsuccessfully. Indeed, when the insurgent leaders and Father Ritchot harangued the gathering, the priest speaking in a most enthusiastic and excited manner, twenty or more of Dease's party went over then and there to the disaffected group. The conciliation plan thus proved a dismal failure.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dennis to McDougall, October 27; B. D., p. 8

Nevertheless, the council continued its hopeless attempts by parley to induce the insurgents to make peace. Governor McTavish conferred with Père Ritchot for three hours, but failed to move him. The insurgents, according to Judge Black, promised Dease that they would permit McDougall to enter the Settlement if the peace party would promise to unite with them in turning him out later should he refuse to accede to their demands. This, of course, was not acceptable. A deputation of three councillors then called upon Riel and his lieutenants in their headquarters at Père Ritchot's residence, but were able to accomplish nothing.<sup>8</sup> The insurgents apparently believed that the council was helpless to coerce them, or did not wish to, and they were confident in their stand.

The English-speaking portion of the Settlement in the meantime quietly remained in the background. As Begg wrote in his "Journal," "The general opinion seemed to be we have not been justly dealt by and we will not at all events oppose those who are fighting our battles to bring in a government that has as yet given us no assurance nor sample of their fair dealing — the universal cry was — we have been overlooked in this matter and if Mr. McDougall should come in and attempt to force on us measures distasteful to us, we will then join in open resistance against him."<sup>9</sup> This statement may be tinted with anti-Canadian sentiment, but it probably expresses the feeling of the English-speaking people at the time.

A more optimistic — and misleading — interpretation of the English opinion was sent by Dennis to McDougall:

They say, we feel a disposition to extend a sincere welcome to the Hon. Mr. McDougall, as the gentleman who has been selected for our future governor.

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<sup>8</sup> same to same, October 28-9; *ibid.*, p. 18-9

<sup>9</sup> p. 11

We regret sincerely that the good name of the colony should be prejudiced by any such action as that we are told is contemplated by a portion of the French half-breeds.

We consider it a most outrageous proceeding on their part, and one that we could be glad to see, if possible, put a stop to. At the same time, should an appeal to arms be necessary, we could hardly justify ourselves in engaging in a conflict which would be, in our opinion, certain to resolve itself into one of nationalities and religions, and of which we could hardly at present see the termination.

We feel this way; we feel confidence in the future administration of the government of this country under Canadian rule. At the same time, we have not been consulted in any way as a people, in entering into the Dominion.

The character of the new government has been settled in Canada without our being consulted. We are prepared to accept it respectfully, to obey the laws and to become good subjects; but when you present to us the issue of a conflict with the French party, with whom we have hitherto lived in friendship, backed up as they would be by the Roman Catholic Church, which appears probable by the course at present being taken by the priests, — in which conflict it is almost certain the aid of the Indians would be invoked, and perhaps by that party, — we feel disinclined to enter upon it, and think that the Dominion should assume the responsibility of establishing amongst us, (sic) which it and it alone has decided upon.

At the same time, we are ready, should the council make an appeal to the Settlement, to prevent the gross outrage contemplated by a large mounted de-



putation, unarmed, to meet and escort the Honourable Wm. McDougall to Winnipeg, and thus show to the Settlement (sic) of the English-speaking portion of the colony is entirely opposed to the present threatening movement by a portion of the French half-breeds; we will cheerfully and promptly respond the call.<sup>10</sup>

Even this statement, optimistic as it is, can hardly be construed as showing great friendliness on the part of the English-speaking settlers towards McDougall and the Canadian government.

It is true that there were some suggestions of raising a force of loyal Britishers to escort the governor-to-be into the Territory. Dennis drummed up some support for this fantastic and exceedingly dangerous plan. He was presented at this time with an address signed by twenty-two persons who signified their willingness to participate in such an expedition.<sup>11</sup> It is probable that there were other settlers of the same persuasion.

Governor McTavish and the council were of a different belief. They advised McDougall that his best course would be "to remain at Pembina and await the issue of events, in the hope of procuring a peaceable dispersion of the malcontents."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> B. D., p. 8

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>12</sup> McTavish to McDougall, October 30; *ibid.*, p. 18

## CHAPTER SIX

### McDougall Helpless in Pembina

This message Colonel Dennis delivered in person to his chief at the Hudson's Bay post north of Pembina. We may now return to William McDougall. The reader will recall that we last left him as he was beating a retreat from that post to Pembina.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying him were Captain Cameron, J. A. N. Provencher, his secretary, and Colonel Dennis. The last named remained with McDougall until November 29.

What was the position of McDougall at this time? It will be clear from the tenor of his instructions<sup>2</sup> that he would have expected a straight-forward task of proceeding to the Territory and making preliminary preparations for the establishment of a government. The cabinet in Ottawa had foreseen little opposition to McDougall's mission,<sup>3</sup> and his arrest at the border was for McDougall himself an almost totally unexpected and a most irritating circumstance. It threw out all his calculations, made him appear ridiculous, and put a full stop to his progress. There is pitiful humor in the picture of this man, who was no doubt dreaming of future splendor as a quasi-potentate in the expansive region of Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories. This stoppage was humiliating. What could he do?

<sup>1</sup> v. s., p. 4

<sup>2</sup> q. v. s., p. 14

<sup>3</sup> Macdonald to Bown, October 14; Letter Book 13, p. 237

John A. Macdonald, wily politician that he was, readily saw the diabolical humor of the situation. "Our friend McDougall has got his hands full," he wrote to a friend. "I could not help, I must say, laughing heartily at the dilemma when I first heard of it. I can fancy his utter dismay. He has no fight in him which is so much the better — bloodshed is to be avoided."

McDougall's first action was to write a plea to Governor McTavish, reminding him that full authority remained with the Company until the actual transfer took place, and urging that it was McTavish's duty to issue a proclamation calling on the insurgents to disperse — as if a proclamation would do any good. McDougall himself was soon to find out how useless proclamations were. This letter was written before he advanced to the Company post:

I have acted on the suggestion of Colonel Dennis (repeated and confirmed by you) that I should delay a few days at Pembina, in the hope that the measures you have taken may result in the withdrawal of the armed parties from their present position. As you are aware, the transfer of the Territory and the powers of government entrusted to you is to take effect on a day to be named in her majesty's royal proclamation. Until that day arrives (which I am informed will be about the 1st December next) you are the legal ruler of the country, and responsible for the preservation of the public peace. My commission authorises and commands me to assume and exercise the powers of government from and after that day. I am instructed to proceed in the mean time to the Territory and report on certain subjects, and make preparations for the new state of things.

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<sup>4</sup> Macdonald to Brydges, November 23; Letter Book 13, p. 512

In these circumstances you will see that legal authority to resist any lawless exhibition of force which may occur previous to the actual transfer of the powers of government is in other hands than mine. You have not, it appears, felt justified in calling upon the loyal and well-disposed inhabitants of the country to aid you in the suppression of the outbreak, of which you have notified me. I must therefore conclude that your better knowledge of the disposition of the people, and of the means at your disposal to enforce your authority, convinces you that such a call would prove ineffectual; but I cannot help thinking that a proclamation from your government explaining the provisions of the late imperial act respecting the Territory, and the authority under which the new government will exercise its powers, at the same time warning the malcontents of the serious nature of the crime they meditated, and the grave consequences to all concerned that must result from its commission, would have been well timed and perhaps sufficient to prevent the designing men at the head of this movement from accomplishing their purposes. I understand from Colonel Dennis that no proclamation or warning has as yet been published at Fort Garry under official sanction.<sup>5</sup>

After his humiliating expulsion from the Territory, he wrote McTavish describing the event<sup>6</sup> and followed this with another letter on November 7 after he heard of the capture of Fort Garry by the insurgents. "I was disappointed to hear from those who met me that they had not been informed by any one in authority that the change of government was an imperial Act, and had the sanc-

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<sup>5</sup>McDougall to McTavish, November 2; B. D., p. 21

<sup>6</sup>same to same, November 4; loc. cit.

tion of the queen," he wrote. There had been, of course, no change of government. Probably McDougall meant the change of government that was due to take place. At the same time, he wrote, "I also reminded you and your council that until the actual transfer and proclamation you are the legal rulers, and responsible for the preservation of the public peace. I am surprised to learn, by a communication brought by the bearer of this, that a few rebels have been allowed to take your Fort, unopposed by even a public protest. Of course I am not in the best position to judge or advise in such a crisis; but, in the hope that by *some* means the people will find out what it is they are doing, and will shrink from the consequences of war, and bloodshed, and confiscation, which are sure to follow. I shall remain here until I hear officially of the transfer of authority, and shall then be guided by circumstances as to what I shall say and do."

There was some wisdom to this plan. Joseph Howe, now secretary of state for the provinces, wrote the Lieutenant-governor approving his passive rest at Pembina:

I am instructed to convey to you (the cabinet's) entire approval of the judgment and prudence displayed by you in the trying circumstances in which you were placed. At this distance from the scene of disturbance any instructions that could be sent to you would only embarrass you, and restrain your freedom of action. You will therefore exercise your own judgment, and decide on the instant, as circumstances change, what is best to be done.

The Government entertain the hope that the opposition presented will be withdrawn when the prejudices aroused have been allayed by frank explanations; and in the mean time they would deeply re-

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<sup>7</sup> McDougall to McTavish, November 7; B. D., p. 23

gret that blood should be shed, or that any hasty or intemperate exercise, even of lawful authority, should, in the transfer of the country, array the feelings of any large portion of the people against your administration.

As matters stand you can claim or assert no authority in the Hudson Bay Territory until the queen's proclamation, annexing the country to Canada, reaches you through this office. It will probably be issued on the 2nd of December, and will be forwarded by a safe hand as soon as received. You had better inform Governor McTavish that you are only proceeding to Fort Garry on the assumed consent of the Company and its officer, and, having stated the facts, await his answer. If he either declines to admit you, or is powerless to give you safe conduct, stay where you are till further advised.\*

Sir John advised McDougall in a letter written at the same time:

You are going there under the assumption that the Company's authorities assent to your entering upon their Territory, and will protect you when there. You cannot force your way in.

**He added:**

It occurs to me that you should ascertain from Governor McTavish the two leading half-breeds in the Territory and inform them at once that you will take them into your council. This man Riel who appears to be the moving spirit is a clever fellow, and you should endeavor to retain him as an officer in your future police.†

\* Howe to McDougall, November 19; B. D., p. 10

† Macdonald to McDougall, November 20; Letter Book 13, p. 479

Again on the 23rd he wrote, "I hope no consideration will induce you to leave your post, that is, to return to Canada, just now. Such a course would cover yourself and your party with ridicule, which would extend itself to the whole Dominion. I am in great hopes that by patience and kindness you may be able to subdue the present excitement."<sup>10</sup>

These letters, of course, McDougall did not receive until December 6 and after.

Meanwhile, he was the recipient of enthusiastic representations from "friends of Canada" in the Settlement, urging him to issue a proclamation placing the Territory under Canadian rule. One piece of advice read as follows:

To the Honourable Wm. McDougall, C.B.,  
Pembina

Winnipeg, 5th November.

The Hudson's Bay Company are evidently with the rebels, and their present role is to prevent your having any official intercourse with them. It is said that the rebels will support the government of the Hudson's Bay Company as it now exists. All the subordinates in the party say that if you have a commission from her majesty to enter here as governor, they will lay down their arms. Riel and the other leaders allow them to know nothing. If the proclamation can be issued here, and the Hudson's Bay Company's government officially called on to act, they (the Company) would be forced to suppress the insurrection, and they can easily do it.

We are friends of the Canadian government."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> same to same, November 23; *ibid.*, p. 510

<sup>11</sup> "Friends of Canada" to McDougall, November 5; B. D., p.22

Charle Mair wrote:

Issue your proclamation, and it will be responded to by 500 men.<sup>12</sup>

From surveyor Snow came the following message:

Issue proclamation, and then you may come fearlessly down. Hudson's Bay Company evidently shaking.<sup>13</sup>

McDougall, however, had no intention of issuing a proclamation until he felt he was legally entitled to. He was waiting for December 1, when the transfer was to occur and he could assume the responsibilities of government with legal authority.<sup>14</sup>

While McDougall was thus waiting at Pembina, Governor McTavish despatched his advice that "to the council and myself it appears that your early return to Canada is not only essential for the peace of the country, but also advisable in the interest of the establishment in the future of the Canadian government."<sup>15</sup>

This letter is a remarkable document, written with consummate diplomacy and skill, worthy of any statesman. It opens with a tactful expression of sympathy for McDougall in his position. Then follows an explanation of the difficulties in issuing a proclamation on behalf of the Company:

It appears you are under the belief that a proclamation from this government explaining the late imperial Act regarding the Territory and warning the people of the consequences of steps tending to impede any action that might be taken under its provisions would have had a salutary effect in checking

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<sup>12</sup> Mair to McDougall, November 8; B. D., p. 32

<sup>13</sup> Snow to McDougall, November 9; B. D., p. 32

<sup>14</sup> McDougall to Howe, November 14; B. D., p. 31

<sup>15</sup> McTavish to McDougall, November 9; B. D., p. 39



the present unlawful movement on the part of the French population. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say with any degree of certainty how far that measure might have produced such a result; but if due consideration be given to the peculiar circumstances in which the local authorities here stood, there will, perhaps, appear to be but little ground for surprise at a measure of that kind not having been adopted.

McTavish then makes clear McDougall's looseness of thought with regard to that matter:

The Act in question referred to the *prospective* transfer of the Territory; but up to this moment we have no official intimation from England or the Dominion of Canada of the fact of the transfer, or of its conditions, or of the date at which they were to take practical effect upon the government of this country. In such a state of matters we think it is evident that any such action on the part of the Red River authorities as that to which you point would necessarily have been marked by a great degree of vagueness and uncertainty; it was felt that it might affect injuriously the future as well as the present government, and we therefore deemed it advisable to await the receipt of official intelligence of the actual transfer of the country, and of all the details which it concerned us to know.

In the next paragraph he makes out a case, plausible enough, for the Company's inactivity in the face of rebellion and failure to preserve the public peace:

With regard to that part of your letter in which you make such express reference to my position as the present legal ruler of the country and to my responsibility for the preservation of the public

peace, permit me to say it is because I so deeply feel that responsibility that I have hitherto been restrained from sanctioning a course so likely, I may almost say so certain, to engender a strife which, for years to come, might prove fatal to the peace and prosperity of the whole country, and make all government impossible. It is unquestionable that the preservation of the public peace is the paramount duty of every government; but, while in ordinary circumstances it might be reasonable enough to cast upon us the exclusive responsibility of preserving the public peace, it may, perhaps, at the same time, admit of doubt whether some degree of responsibility did not also rest upon others in a case of so exceptional a character as this — a case in which not merely a whole country is transferred, but also in a certain sense, a whole people; or where at least the political condition of the people undergoes such a great change; and it may, moreover, be a question whether, on the part of the Dominion, the preliminary arrangements for introducing that change have proceeded upon such a just and accurate appreciation of the condition of the country and the peculiar feelings and habits of its people as, on such an occasion, was desirable, if not absolutely necessary, and whether the complications by which we are now surrounded may not to a great extent be owing to that circumstance.

After thus blaming the Canadian government for the rising, the letter continues:

But at a time like this, when it is felt that all our energies ought to be directed to the possible removal of the obstacles that oppose the peaceable inauguration of your government, it would be out of place here to go into the discussion of such points as

relate to the responsibility of the (sic) concerned in the introduction of the new order of things, and I shall therefore proceed to deal with matters of a more practical, as well as more pressing, nature.

The possibility of half-breed domination of the whole Settlement is slighted:

What the ultimate object of the malcontents may be, it is difficult to ascertain; but if they are aiming at establishing a government of their own, as the leaders whom you met on the 2nd instant rather prematurely said they had already done, I doubt very much whether the rest of the Settlement are at all likely to submit to such a domination; but whether they may think it best tacitly to ignore such a usurpation of power, while it consisted merely in a name, or actively resist it, or take part in the movement in the hope of moderating and directing it, will, I apprehend, greatly depend upon circumstances.

Likewise the annexion scare:

It seems by no means improbable that on both sides of the line there may be persons who are looking with a degree of sympathy upon this movement of the French population: *their* motives it is not difficult to imagine; but it seems to be nothing short of infatuation for the leaders of these disturbances to encourage the idea of annexation to the States; for it is highly improbable that whatever might be the influence of such a change upon other portions of the community, its effect upon the French population could hardly fail to prove unfavorable to them.

Then is stated the insurgents' determination to keep McDougall out of the Territory.

Excepting in one respect — but that, I am sorry to say, a serious, if not formidable, sense — little change, so far as we can learn, has since my last, come over the arrangements or the spirit of these people.<sup>16</sup> The prevention of your entrance into the Settlement was the object they first proposed to themselves, and upon that object they appear to be as fully bent as ever . . .

The weak portion of the letter which is inconsistent with facts and weak in logic is the last part:

The occurrence to which I have alluded in the preceding paragraph as being serious is this, that on the afternoon of Tuesday, the 2nd instant, a number of these daring people suddenly, and without the least intimation of their intention to make such a move,<sup>17</sup> took possession of the gates of Fort Garry, where they placed themselves inside and outside the gates to the number, in all, of about 120, and where, night and day, they have constantly kept a pretty strong guard . . .

On coming into the Fort they earnestly disclaimed all intention of injuring either person or property within it — and it must be allowed that in that respect they have kept their word; but it is an inconvenience and a danger next to intolerable to have a body of armed men, even with professions of peace toward ourselves, forcibly billeted upon an establishment such as this. Their intentions in coming

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<sup>16</sup> a mild way of describing the seizure of Fort Garry

<sup>17</sup> Sergeant Mulligan, at the time chief of police at Fort Garry, stated later in an affidavit that he "urged upon Dr. Cowan, the chief factor in charge of Fort Garry, the danger in which the Fort stood, from the intention of the insurgents to seize it; and requested him to call upon a portion of the 300 special constables and the pensioners to defend it." (Gunn, D. and Tuttle, C. R., op. cit., p. 350)

to the Fort they have never expressed definitely, nor have they yet specified the danger from which their presence was meant to protect the place. We are therefore left in some measure to conjectures, and by these we are strongly led to believe that you were expected to come to the Fort, and that by thus having previous possession of the gates, they felt that they would be sure of keeping you out.

It is needless to ask why their presence was submitted to, as I presume you already know enough of the circumstances fully to understand that it was only borne as being apparently, with respect to the immediate results, the less formidable of two very serious evils.

McTavish concludes:

. . . . we perceive there is as little chance as ever of these people receding from opposition to your coming into the Settlement; that the attempt might be productive of the most disastrous consequences; and that while you remain at Pembina, the effect, so far as the Settlement is concerned, is likely to be the perpetuation, and possibly even the aggravation, of the state of disturbance and danger . . . . to the council and myself it appears that your early return to Canada is not only essential for the peace of the country, but also advisable in the interest of the establishment in the future of the Canadian government . . . .

This masterly letter is not the work of a very sick person. With sword-sharp logic it tore to shreds McDougall's petulant advice. That gentleman was no doubt hotly incensed when he read it. He considered it an "extraordinary" epistle. But Macdonald, when he read it,

recognized in it "an honest expression of his (McTavish's) opinion,"<sup>18</sup> which undoubtedly it was.

McDougall, meanwhile, continued to "await the issue of events" — the only possible thing he could do in the circumstances. Varied and conflicting reports of new developments seem to have filled him with nervousness, if not with actual fear. First was the rumor that the insurgents intended to starve out his party. Then came the thought that they might attack him in Pembina. "If they come to molest us on American soil," he wrote to Sir John, "we will shoot without hesitation for this is the country where everyone shoots when he has a mind to, and the verdict when you shoot in self-defence always is 'served 'em right'." In preparation for such an onslaught the worried man practised shooting in public and exhibited his skill before the "Yankees" and half-breeds. The effect on them seems to have reassured him somewhat.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, December 8; Letter Book 13, p. 667

<sup>19</sup> McDougall to Macdonald, November 18; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2, p. 150

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Riel and the Insurgents in Command

On November 2, as we have seen, the insurgents seized Fort Garry and proceeded to occupy it.<sup>1</sup> Armed sentries were posted at the gates and patrolled the platform. Watch was maintained day and night, the guard being relieved regularly. The store in which the liquor was contained was locked, and the Métis conducted themselves with sobriety. Private property in the district was scrupulously respected, although the Company was levied upon for provisions—which the insurgents promised to pay for out of their funds.<sup>2</sup> Statements were issued that no property and no individuals would be molested.<sup>3</sup>

The Settlement was under the complete control of Riel and his party. The chief constable of the Council of Assiniboia was deposed, and his work was done by the guard. This was very efficiently performed, and order and decorum were preserved in Winnipeg. Parties constantly were stopped at the Rivière Sale barrier. Both incoming and outgoing mails were detained and subjected to examination. Packages of guns and ammunition were confiscated. These acts tended to arouse hostility on the part of the English-speaking portion of the Settlement who hitherto had remained quietly on the watch.

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<sup>1</sup> v. s. pp. 4 and 46

<sup>2</sup> McTavish to W. G. Smith, November 2; B. D., p. 187

<sup>3</sup> This and the following based on B. D., p. 26-7

A new flag was adopted. It was composed of a white ground, upon which were displayed three crosses—the center one large and scarlet colored, the side ones smaller and gold colored. A golden fringe bordered the white ground. The Hudson's Bay Company flag was run down and replaced by the new emblem.

The insurgents' council meetings were resumed in their new and commodious headquarters. John Bruce was the figurehead president,<sup>4</sup> but the most important of the members was the moving spirit and real leader, Louis Riel. The personality of Riel is of immense importance in understanding the uprising. A young man,<sup>5</sup> he was possessed of ability, courage, and force of character. Bryce says he was "of fair ability, but proud, vain, and assertive."<sup>6</sup> He seems, even in youth, to have been self-assertive and, according to Bishop Taché, afflicted with megalomania.<sup>7</sup> Combined with the neurosis of which he became the unfortunate victim, this characteristic proved a serious danger, as we shall see, and later this trait seems to have developed into a morbid paranoia, or delusion of grandeur. This, of course was scarcely evident in 1869-70; it became pronounced in 1875 and later years.<sup>8</sup>

The most outstanding quality evident in Riel at the beginning of the outbreak was his sincere feeling of patriotism as he conceived it. This is discernible in his deep sense of the injustice being wrought on the Métis, his expressions of the wrongs they were being subjected to, and his passionate determination to secure right for them.

Another influential member of the council was Father Ritchot, who gave strong support to the insurgent movement, and who loaned it the sanction of that most im-

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<sup>4</sup> Trial of Lepine, p. 62; and v. i., p. 103

<sup>5</sup> He was 25 years old at the time of the uprising.

<sup>6</sup> Bryce, G., "Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay

<sup>7</sup> Machray, R., op. cit., p. 172

<sup>8</sup> "Queen vs Riel," p. 12 et. seq.



pressive organization — the Church. Père Ritchot later denied that he had any connection with the origin of the disturbance and asserted that he had been ignorant of its early events.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not this is true — and it may be reasonably doubted, for Father Ritchot appears to have been a deceitful person — it seems clear enough throughout the insurrection he was one of the most influential leaders in the inner councils of the Métis. This has been demonstrated already and will be made more clear as the story proceeds.<sup>10</sup>

An important member, who joined the insurgent ranks after the seizure of Fort Garry, was William B. O'Donohue. Educated for the priesthood and with numerous connections among the Fenians, he was a valuable acquisition to the rebel ranks.<sup>11</sup> O'Donohue became treasurer and collected the four per cent sales tax which formerly had been levied on all merchandise by the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Company at the time was powerless to assert its authority and rule, and accordingly the insurgents' committee proceeded to make preparations for a provisional government to administer the affairs of the Settlement and to negotiate with the Dominion of Canada. The Canadian and imperial governments never recognized the provisional government which eventually was set up,<sup>12</sup> but the insurgent leaders always maintained the righteousness of their course and justified the establishment of a temporary local government in the absence of any real government on the part of either the Hudson's Bay Company or Canada.<sup>13</sup>

A proclamation was drawn up and submitted to Wal-

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<sup>9</sup> "Causes of Difficulties," p. 69

<sup>10</sup> v. s., p. 32-3

<sup>11</sup> McTavish to W. G. Smith, November 16; B. D., p. 185

<sup>12</sup> Macdonald's evidence in "Causes of Difficulties," p. 103

<sup>13</sup> op. cit., p. 176

ter Bown, proprietor of the "Nor-Wester," for printing. Bown first consulted his friends and then declined to publish the proclamation. On his refusal to do so he was made a prisoner in his printing establishment, and friends of the insurgents set up and printed the notice. James Ross, proprietor of the "Red River Pioneer," supervised the work.<sup>14</sup> It read as follows:

## PUBLIC NOTICE

To the Inhabitants of Rupert's Land

Winnipeg, 6th November, 1869.

The president and representatives of the French-speaking population of Rupert's Land in council, "the invaders of our rights being now expelled," already aware of your sympathy, do extend the hand of friendship to you our friendly inhabitants, and in so doing invite you to send twelve representatives from the following places, viz:

St. John's 1, St. Margaret's 1, Headingly 1, St. James 1, St. Mary's 1, Kildonan 1, St. Paul's 1, St. Andrew's 1, St. Clement's 1, St. Peter's 1, Town of Winnipeg 2, in order to form one body with the above council, consisting of twelve members, to consider the political state of this country, and to adopt such measures as may be deemed best for the future welfare of the same.

A meeting of the above council will be held in the court house at Fort Garry on Tuesday, the 16th day of November, at which the invited representatives will attend.

By order of the President,  
Louis Riel, Secretary.

<sup>14</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 15

<sup>15</sup> B. D., p. 32

It was a question whether the English-speaking people would send representatives to join the insurgents' committee. The Canadian element, of course, was opposed to this plan, and advised McDougall, through Colonel Dennis, that no support would be forthcoming to Riel. "In most of the parishes," wrote "the friends of Canada," "no answer will be made to Riel's proclamation, or if acted on at all, will be simply to send a letter protesting against their past and present action."<sup>16</sup>

The same letter informed McDougall that "we will have a strong protest into the authorities here at once against their inaction, and embodying the suggestions made in the letter. The "letter" referred to cannot be traced. Begg in his "History of the North-West" severely criticizes Dennis. "The fact of Col. Dennis having acted with the authority of Mr. McDougall, and intrigued with parties in the Settlement to interfere with Mr. McTavish in the discharge of his duties, was, to say the least of it, undignified on the part of an in-coming governor."<sup>17</sup>

The protest came to Governor McTavish on November 12 in the form of a "round robin." Signed by "a large number of most respectable inhabitants,"<sup>18</sup> the address ran:

We, the undersigned, residents of the town of Winnipeg, and loyal subjects of her majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland,

Beholding with great alarm the unsettled state of feeling in this Territory, and the threatening po-

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<sup>16</sup> to Dennis, November 12; B. D., p. 33

<sup>17</sup> p. 392

<sup>18</sup> So the "Nor-Wester" spoke of its own clique.

sition assumed by a portion of its French-speaking population towards the Crown, in the person of her majesty's representative, the future governor of this Territory, and believing, as we do, that this dissatisfaction or dissatisfaction is the result of various slanderous interpretations having been from time to time, disseminated among the people by persons unknown;

We do, therefore, now demand that you, as the representatives of her majesty in this Territory, do proclaim among the people, either by convening a public meeting for that purpose, or posting in conspicuous places throughout the country a full and correct exposition of the nature of the transfer of this Territory to the Dominion of Canada.

We also request that you will explain, so far as lies in your power, the policy likely to be adopted by the Canadian authorities relatives to the governing of this Territory.

Also that you deny the numerous libellous slanders which are in circulation regarding the purpose for which the Territory was acquired. That you warn them of the danger that they are incurring to themselves by persistence in their present violent course, thereby imperilling the future welfare of the country; and that you do entreat them to lay down their arms, and return peaceably to their homes.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime, the English parishes decided to send their delegates to the convention. They had acted thus induced by the hope that some good might come out of a united discussion. Following is the list of delegates:

Winnipeg

Henry McKenney  
H. F. O'Loane

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<sup>19</sup> B. D., p. 40

Kildonan	James Ross
St. John's	Maurice Lowman
St. Paul's	Dr. Bird
St. Andrew's	Donald Gunn
St. Clement's	Thomas Bunn
St. Peter's	Henry Prince
St. James'	Robert Tait
St. Ann's	George Gunn
Headingley	William Tait
Portage La Prairie	John Garrioch

Those already representing the French were:

St. François Xavier	François Dauphinie
	Pierre Poitras
	Patrice Breland
St. Boniface	Wm. O'Donohue
St. Vital	André Beaucheman
	Pierre Parenteau
St. Norbert	Louis La Certe
	Baptiste Tournon
St. Ann	Charles Nolin
	Jean Baptiste Perrault <sup>20</sup>

The convention assembled at noon on November 16 in the court house guarded by one hundred and fifty armed men. The most important event of the day was the reading of Governor McTavish's proclamation. The Canadians ascribed its appearance to the pressure applied by them. Begg in his book, "The Creation of Manitoba," however, states that, "In the first place, it can be proved that Governor McTavish's proclamation was already in the hands of his secretary, Mr. Hargrave, when the address from the "Friends of Canada" reached its destination."<sup>21</sup> No proof other than this statement is given by

<sup>20</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 16

<sup>21</sup> p. 60-1

Chronicler Begg. Machray states that, "On the bishop's suggestion MacTavish drew up a protest against the actions of Riel and the insurgents."<sup>22</sup> It is altogether likely that Bishop Machray influenced McTavish toward this action. It is also probable that he was getting tired of McDougall's pleas for a proclamation and decided that he would issue one and appease the demand. The proclamation read as follows:

Whereas I, William McTavish, Governor of Assiniboine, have been informed that a meeting is to be held to-day of persons from the different districts of the Settlement, for the ostensible purpose of taking into consideration the present political condition of the Colony, and for suggesting such measures as may appear to be best adapted for meeting the difficulties and dangers connected with the existing state of public affairs; and whereas, I deem it advisable at this juncture to place before that meeting, as well as before the whole body of the people, what it appears necessary for me to declare in the interest of public order, and of the safety and welfare of the Settlement: Therefore,

I notify all whom it concerns, that, during the last few weeks, large bodies of armed men have taken positions on the Public highroad to Pembina, and contrary to the remonstrances and protests of the Public Authorities have committed the following unlawful acts:—

1st. They have forcibly obstructed the movements of various persons travelling on the public highway in the peaceable prosecution of their lawful business and have thus violated that personal liberty which is the undoubted right of all Her Majesty's subjects.

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<sup>22</sup> op. cit., p. 179

2nd. They have unlawfully seized and detained on the road at LaRivière Sale, in the parish of St. Norbert, goods and merchandise of various descriptions, and of very considerable value, belonging as well to persons coming into the Colony, as to persons already settled here, and carrying on their business in the Settlement, thereby causing great loss and inconvenience, not only to the owners of these goods, but, as has formally been complained of, also to the carriers of the same, and possibly involving the whole Colony in a ruinous responsibility.

3rd. They have unlawfully interfered with the public Mails, both outgoing and incoming, and by their tampering with the established means of communication between the Settlement and the outside world, have shaken the public confidence in the security of the Mails, and given a shock to the trade and commerce of the Colony of which the mischievous effects cannot now be fully estimated.

4th. Not only without permission, but in the face of repeated remonstrances on the part of the Hudson Bay Company's Officer in immediate charge of Fort Garry, they have, in numbers varying from about 60 to 120, billeted themselves on that establishment, under the plea of protecting it from a danger which, they alleged, was known by themselves to be imminent, but of which they have never yet disclosed the particular nature; they have placed armed guards at the gates of an establishment, of it which every stick and stone is private property, in spite of the most distinct protest against such a disregard of the rights of property; they have taken possession of rooms within the Fort, and although they have there, as yet, committed no direct act of violence to persons or property beyond what has been enumerated, yet, by their presence in such

numbers, with arms for no legitimate purpose that can be assigned, they have created a state of excitement and alarm within and around the Fort, which seriously interferes with the regular business of the establishment.

5th. A body of armed men have entered the Hudson Bay Company's Post at Pembina, where certain gentlemen from Canada, with their families, were peaceably living, and under threats of violence, have compelled them to quit the establishment at a season of the year when the rigours of winter were at hand, and forced them to retire within American Territory. And,

In the last place, they have avowed it as their intention, in all these unlawful proceedings, to resist arrangements for the transfer of the Government of this Country, which have been made under the sanction of the Imperial Parliament, and of virtually setting at defiance the Royal Authority, instead of adopting those lawful and constitutional means, which, under the enlightened rule of Her Most Gracious Majesty our Queen, are sufficient for the ultimate attainment of every object that rests upon reason and justice.

The persons who have been engaged in committing these unlawful deeds, have resorted to acts which directly tend to involve themselves in consequences of the gravest nature, and to bring upon the Colony and the country at large the evils of anarchy and the horrors of war.

Therefore, in the interests of law and order, and in behalf of all the securities you have for life and property, and, in a word, for the sake of the present and future welfare of the Settlement and its inhabitants, I again earnestly and emphatically protest against each and all of these unlawful acts. I charge



those engaged in them, before they are irretrievably and hopelessly involved, immediately to disperse themselves, and peaceably to depart to their habitations, or to their lawful business, under the pains and penalties of the law; and whatever in other respects may be the conclusions of those who meet to deliberate upon the present critical and distracted state of public affairs, I adjure you, as citizens having the interests of your country and kindred at heart, to ratify and proclaim with all the might of your united voices this Public Notice, and Protest, and so avert from the country a succession of evils, of which those who see the beginning may never see the end.

You are dealing with a crisis, out of which may come incalculable good or immeasurable evil; and with all the weight of my official authority, and all the influence of my individual position, let me finally charge you to adopt only such means as are lawful and constitutional, rational and safe. Given under my hand and seal, at Fort Garry, this 16th day of November, 1869.

(Signed) WILLIAM McTAVISH,  
Governor of Assiniboine.<sup>23</sup>

It will be seen that the proclamation was merely an empty protest; it had little effect on the assembly and in no way interfered with the insurgent movement. No doubt McTavish realized that his proclamation was only a gesture and that his company was powerless to enforce law and order. That no move toward enforcing order was made is seen by the absence of any charges against the insurgents during the Company court sessions of November 18 and 19.

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<sup>23</sup> B. D., p. 41

Our information regarding the convention is scanty and unreliable. The main source is Begg's "Journal," and as he was never in the councils, he could make no notes of the proceedings. No one else seems to have done so, as far as this writer has found. Care must be taken in interpreting Begg's statements, it being borne in mind that he was friendly to the Hudson's Bay Company.

The convention had the following possibilities to consider:

- (1) a compromise with McDougall
- (2) negotiations with the Canadian government
- (3) establishment of an independent republic
- (4) negotiations with the imperial government for the establishment of a colony under Britain
- (5) annexation to the United States
- (6) a return to the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company for the time being

It seems, however, that all the above possibilities were not considered.

On the second day of the meeting (November 22) the delegates discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a connection with Canada. There was much disagreement and nothing definite was arrived at.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Thomas Bunn pointedly said that nothing had been accomplished during the three days, and he recommended that the French state precisely what they wanted. He advocated that they disarm and permit McDougall to enter the Settlement. Louis Riel immediately offered determined opposition to this suggestion. He declared that McDougall would never enter the Settlement either as a private citizen or in the capacity of governor.<sup>25</sup> The French party declared that McDougall

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<sup>24</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 33

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

could only be brought into the Settlement over their dead bodies.<sup>26</sup> The possibility of negotiations with McDougall was thus destroyed. The insurgents would have nothing to do with that gentleman.

While using the method of convention of joint delegates, Riel proceeded with his usurpation of power. Early on the morning of the twenty-third, he commandeered the Company's records and accounts.<sup>27</sup>

When the delegates convened that day, the French announced their intention of establishing a provisional government, a step which would put the Territory in a position to negotiate with Canada. The English delegates felt that they had no authority to deal with such a proposal and would need to consult their constituents. Consequently the convention was adjourned until December 1.<sup>28</sup> This date may have been chosen, as McTavish surmised, because the French hoped that a royal proclamation announcing the transfer would arrive by that time, and, McDougall not being in the Territory, there would be no government, and the way would be clear for the formation of a provisional government.<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime, a number of influential Englishmen proposed an intermediate course.<sup>30</sup> They suggested to O'Donohue that the Company continue to govern as before and that the people elect a committee to treat with the Canadian government. O'Donohue promised to use his influence to induce the French to accept the plan. Riel was urged by the English party to adhere to the scheme and gave his assurance that he would support it — probably, as Tuttle suggests, because Riel desired to have the

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<sup>26</sup> McTavish to W. G. Smith, November 23; B. D., p. 188

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 36

<sup>29</sup> McTavish to W. G. Smith, November 30; B. D. p. 189

<sup>30</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 41 and p. 44

English attend the convention on December 1.<sup>31</sup> For Riel retracted on the thirtieth — the day before the convention—and reverted to the provisional government scheme.<sup>32</sup>

On December 1 the French delegates convened. The English representatives assembled separately to discuss whether to attend the joint meeting. While they were thus in session, word was received that Dennis had entered the Settlement with the expected proclamation announcing the transfer, and shortly afterwards Robert Tait arrived with a copy of it.<sup>33</sup> A. G. Bannatyne placed the proclamation before the French delegates. He then sent the following message to the English group:

To Dr. Bird, Mr. Bown, W. and R. Tait, Mr. Gunn, and all the English delegates — I have shown the proclamation to all the French delegates, who are here now; and they will be glad if you come up; all are quiet and pleased, and I believe much good can be done by coming here at once.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd) A. G. B. BANNATYNE.<sup>34</sup>

A joint discussion was held during the afternoon. Then the French met in a separate body and drew up a Bill of Rights. These were practically agreed to by both elements as the basis of a demand to be made to Canada:

### LIST OR RIGHTS

1. That the people have the right to elect their own legislature.

<sup>31</sup> Gunn, D. and Tuttle, C. R., op. cit., p. 359

<sup>32</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 49

<sup>33</sup> v. i., p. 81

<sup>34</sup> Begg, A. "History of the North-West," vol. 1, p. 402

2. That the legislature have the power to pass all laws local to the Territory, over the veto of the executive by a two-thirds vote.

3. That no Act of the Dominion parliament (local to the Territory) be binding on the people until sanctioned by the legislature of the Territory.

4. That all sheriffs, magistrates, constables, school commissioners, etc., etc., be elected by the people.<sup>85</sup>

5. A free homestead and pre-emption law.

6. That a portion of the public lands be appropriated to the benefit of schools, the building of roads, bridges, and public buildings.

7. That it be guaranteed to connect Winnipeg by rail with the nearest line of railroad within a term of five years; the land grant to be subject to the local legislature.

8. That for the term of four years all military, civil, and municipal expenses be paid out of the Dominion funds.

9. That the military be composed of the inhabitants now existing in the Territory.

10. That the English and French languages be common in the legislature and courts, and that all public documents and Acts of the legislature be published in both languages.

11. That the judge of the supreme court speak the English and the French languages.

12. That treaties be concluded and ratified between the Dominion government and the several tribes of Indians in the Territory to ensure peace on the frontier.

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<sup>85</sup> Note the American influence

13. That we have a fair and full representation in the Canadian parliament.

14. That all the privileges, customs, and usages existing at the time of the transfer be respected.<sup>36</sup>

It was then suggested that delegates be elected to confer with McDougall at Pembina, but Riel vigorously opposed this proposal. These rights, he said, must be first guaranteed to the people by the Canadian parliament. McDougall would not be permitted to enter the Settlement, nor would any promise be accepted from him until such an Act of Parliament was passed. The meeting then broke up.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> B. D., p. 77

<sup>37</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 408. The List of Rights which was distributed in the Settlement had a different ending paragraph. A copy of it is to be found in Begg's "Journal;" another copy found its way to McDougall, and is printed in B. D., p. 77. The paragraph reads as follows:

All the above articles (1-14 incl.) have been severally discussed and adopted by the French and English representatives without a dissenting voice, as the conditions upon which the people of Rupert's Land enter into Confederation. The French representatives then proposed, in order to secure the above rights, that a delegation be appointed and sent to Pembina to see Mr. McDougall and ask him if he could guarantee these rights by virtue of his commission; and if he could do so, that then the French people would join to a man to escort Mr. McDougall into his government seat. But, on the contrary, if Mr. McDougall could not guarantee such rights, that the delegates request him to remain where he is, or return till the rights can be guaranteed by Act of the Canadian parliament. The English representatives refused to appoint delegates to go to Pembina to consult with Mr. McDougall, stating they had no authority to do so from their constituents, upon which the council was dissolved.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### McDougall Issues Proclamation

We shall now trace McDougall's activities up to the issuing of his proclamation. We last left him at his rifle practice.<sup>1</sup> There were, however, other things that occupied his mind. Word was received, through an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, that the insurgents planned to burn the Company storehouse in Georgetown in order to destroy the arms and ammunition which McDougall had stored there. This was to be done at once if the convention was in favor of the insurrection. On receiving this information, McDougall acted with celerity and despatch. He wrote the commanding officer at Fort Abercrombie, forty miles away, requesting him to take care of the arms. Then, planning to forestall the raid, he caused it to be rumored among the friends of the insurgents at Pembina that the arms already had been moved to Ft. Abercrombie.<sup>2</sup>

Also to engage McDougall's mind came the news that Riel had placed a guard over the Canadian Government stores of pork which were under the care of Dr. Schultz. The Canadians in the Territory wrote to Pembina for advice and offered to remove the stores to the lower Fort for safe keeping. This would also give them an excuse

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<sup>1</sup> v. s., p. 48

<sup>2</sup> McDougall to Howe, November 25; B. D., p. 47

to occupy the Stone Fort, where a large amount of ammunition was stored.<sup>3</sup>

The Canadians realized, of course, that, "This will have the effect perhaps, of precipitating matters." McDougall understood that, too. He therefore sent in reply the following instructions:

With regard to the provisions and public property which you say are in danger of being seized by a band of lawless men and removed from the custody of those who have been entrusted with them, I am instructed to convey Mr. McDougall's orders as follows:

1st. Apply to the local authorities for a sufficient force to prevent it.

2nd. If this is refused, or if no such force can be had, apply to Governor McTavish, or the officer in charge of the Stone Fort, for permission to store the property there for safe keeping, and ask him to give you authority to guard and defend it by the voluntary aid of the law-abiding inhabitants.

3rd. If this permission to store in the fort is granted, remove the provisions, etc., there and hire a sufficient number of persons to remove and defend it against all illegal attempts at appropriation.

4th. But in the event of a seizure, or attempt at seizure, by a considerable force of armed men either before or during the removal above suggested and authorized, you are advised not to risk a collision which may cause bloodshed unless the local authorities shall have sanctioned the organization of an armed force for the purpose of protecting the property.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Grant to Dennis, November 24; B. D., p. 56-7

<sup>4</sup> Dennis to Grant, November 25; B. D., p. 57



To Governor McTavish McDougall wrote: "May I request that you will give Mr. Grant and Mr. Snow, and any other persons who may have in lawful custody any of this property, such assistance as you can command to protect it from molestation by the lawless persons referred to? If in your judgment the proposal to remove it to the Stone Fort, and to protect it there in the way proposed by the persons who will reply to you, is feasible, and under the circumstances advisable, I should feel obliged to you if you will give them the desired authority.<sup>5</sup>

Writing to Howe at the time, McDougall said, "I do not regard the possession of the Government stores by Riel and his party as of very much consequence. They cannot eat them up at once, and if the measures I have taken to organize an armed force to seize Riel and his colleagues, and disperse the rank and file of his followers should prove successful, the provisions will soon be again in our possession."<sup>6</sup>

"Measures I have taken to organize an armed force." And in the same letter McDougall informed Howe that he had prepared a proclamation in the name of the Queen, announcing the transfer of the Territory to Canada. Mr. McDougall had indeed been busily engaged in momentous projects.

Following is the "Queen's" proclamation:

Whereas by "The British North America Act, 1867," it was (amongst other things) enacted that it should be lawful for Her Majesty by and with the advice of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, on Address from the Houses of the Parliament of Canada, to admit Rupert's Land and

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<sup>5</sup> McDougall to McTavish, November 25; B. D., p. 58

<sup>6</sup> McDougall to Howe, November 29; B. D., p. 55

the North-western Territory, or either of them, into the Union or Dominion of Canada on such terms and conditions as are in the Address expressed, and as Her Majesty thinks fit to approve.

And whereas for the purpose of carrying into effect the said provisions of "The British North America Act, 1867," "The Rupert's Land Act, 1868," enacted and declared that it should be competent for "the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay," to surrender to Her Majesty, and for Her Majesty, by any Instrument under her Sign Manual and signet to accept a surrender of all or any of the Lands, Territories, Powers, and authorities whatsoever, granted or purported to be granted by certain Letters Patent of His Late Majesty King Charles the Second to the said Governor and Company within Rupert's Land upon such terms and conditions as should be agreed upon by and between Her Majesty and the said Governor and Company.

And whereas by "The Rupert's Land Act, 1868," it is further enacted, that from the date of the admission of Rupert's Land into the Dominion of Canada, as aforesaid, it shall be lawful for the Parliament of Canada to make, ordain, and establish within the said Land and Territory so admitted as aforesaid all such laws, institutions, and ordinances, and to constitute such courts and officers as may be necessary for the peace, order, and good government of Her Majesty's subjects and others therein.

And whereas, it is further provided by the said Act, that until otherwise enacted by the said Parliament of Canada, all the powers, authorities, and jurisdiction of the several Courts of Justice now established in Rupert's Land, and of the several Of-

ficers thereof, and of all Magistrates and Justices now acting within the said limits shall continue in full force and effect therein.

And whereas the said Governor and Company have surrendered to Her Majesty, and Her Majesty has accepted a surrender of all the Lands, Territories, Rights, Privileges, Liberties, Franchises, Powers, and authorities granted, or purported to be granted by the said Letters Patent, upon certain terms and conditions agreed upon by and between Her Majesty and the said Governor and Company.

And whereas Her Majesty, by and with the advice of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, and on an Address from both the Houses of the Parliament of Canada, in pursuance of the One hundred and forty-sixth Section of "The British North America Act, 1867, "hath declared that Rupert's Land, and the North-western Territory, shall from the first day of December, in the year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine, be admitted into and become part of the Dominion of Canada, upon the terms and conditions expressed in the said Address of which Her Majesty has approved, and Rupert's land and the said North-western Territory are admitted into the Union, and have become part of the Dominion of Canada accordingly.

And whereas the Parliament of Canada, by an Act entitled "An Act for the Temporary Government of Rupert's Land and "the North-western Territory when United with Canada," enacted that it should be lawful for the Governor by any order or orders to be by him from time to time made, with the advice of the Privy Council (and subject to such conditions and restrictions as to him should seem

meet) to authorise and empower such officer as he may from time to time appoint as Lieutenant-Governor of the North-west Territories, to make provision for the administration of justice therein, and generally to make, ordain, and establish all such Laws and Institutions, and Ordinances as may be necessary for the peace, order, and good government of Her Majesty's subjects and others therein.

Now know ye that we have seen fit by our Royal Letters Patent bearing date the Twenty-ninth day of September, in the year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine, to appoint the Honourable William McDougall, of the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, in our Dominion of Canada, and member of our Privy Council for Canada, and Companion of our Most Honourable Order of the Bath, on, from, and after the day to be named by us, for the admission of Rupert's Land and the North-western territory aforesaid into the Union or Dominion of Canada, to wit, on, from, and after the first day of December, in the year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine, to be during our pleasure the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-west Territories.

And we did thereby authorize, and empower, and require, and command him in due manner to do and execute in all things that shall belong to his said command, and the trust we have reposed in him according to the several provisions and instructions granted or appointed him by virtue of our said Commission and the Act of the Parliament of Canada herein before recited, and according to such instructions as have been, or may from time to time be given to him, and to such laws as are or shall be enforced within the North-west Territories.

Of all which our loving subjects of our said Territories, and all others whom these presents may concern, are hereby required to take notice and govern themselves accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

How McDougall came to issue the proclamation without official instructions to do so is an interesting topic. It will be remembered that he had been importuned by the "friends of Canada" to issue a proclamation and proceed into the Settlement.<sup>8</sup> He had resisted these pleas. Nevertheless, the idea of a proclamation was continually on his mind as a solution of his difficulties. On November 18 he wrote Macdonald: "I am getting very uneasy about the proclamation. It was a mistake to send me without full authority, but it will be an awful blunder to leave me here without it beyond the 1st December. Provencher stupidly left behind almost the only thing of any use he was charged with — the seal — but we have sent for it, and it may come in time."<sup>9</sup> In his despatch of the 25th to the secretary of state for the provinces he wrote, "I am still without any official notice of the imperial order in council, and must act, if at all, upon the information contained in the private letters from Sir Curtis Lampson, which announces the date of transfer agreed to by the imperial government to be 1st December next."<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, on or just before the 29th of November, McDougall, not having received any further instructions, prepared a proclamation to be issued on December 1, quoting, as we have seen, Acts of parliament to reinforce his authority and stating the "fact" of the surrender of the Territory by the Hudson's Bay Company, "acceptance" by Her Majesty, and "transfer" to Canada. "These facts" he gathered "from the newspapers, from a private

<sup>7</sup> B. D., p. 108-9

<sup>8</sup> v. s. p. 41

<sup>9</sup> Macdonald Papers, vol. II, p. 150

<sup>10</sup> MacDougall to Howe, November 25; B. D., p. 47

letter to me of the deputy governor of the Company, and my own knowledge before I left Ottawa, that the 1st of December had been agreed upon as the date of the transfer.<sup>11</sup>

Unhappy blunder of misguided statesman! Little did McDougall know that his confrères in Ottawa had decided cautiously to renounce their intention of taking over the Red River district while it was embroiled in insurrection. Immediately after the Government received McDougall's letter announcing officially that he had been excluded from the Territory, Sir John Young telegraphed the fact to Lord Granville, secretary of state for the colonies, and informed the imperial government that Canada would not take over the Territory until peaceable possession could be obtained:

On surrender by Company to Queen, the Government of Company ceases. The responsibility of administration of affairs will then rest on imperial government. Canada cannot accept transfer unless quiet possession can be given — anarchy will follow. My advisers think Proclamation should be postponed. Mr. McDougall will remain near frontier waiting favorable opportunity for peaceable ingress.

Parties having influence with Indians and half-breeds, are proceeding to join McDougall.<sup>12</sup>

On November 27 MacDonald forwarded McDougall a long letter in which he explained the situation. Following is a quotation at length from this despatch:


The situation of affairs with you is a grave one, and to be handled with great care. The illness of Governor McTavish and the absence of Bishop Ta-

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<sup>11</sup> same to same, November 29, p. 55

<sup>12</sup> Sir John Young to Earl Granville, November 27; B. D., p. 12  
Note the reference to the commissioners; v. i., p. 74, 77, and 104

ché are both to be deplored as their influence is paralysed. I hope, however, that better counsels among these half-breeds will soon prevail and that you will be permitted access to the country. You speak of crossing the line and being sworn in the moment you receive official notice of the transfer of the Territory. Now it seems to us that that step cannot well be taken. You ought not to swear that you will perform duties that you are by the actions of the insurgents prevented from performing. By assuming the government you relieve the Hudson's Bay authorities from all responsibility in the matter. As things stand they are responsible for the peace and good government of the country, and ought to be held to that responsibility until they are in a position to give peaceable possession. A proclamation such as you suggest, calling upon the people, in your capacity as lieutenant-governor, to unite in support the law and calling upon the insurgents to disperse would be very well if it were sure to be obeyed. If, however, it were disobeyed, your weakness and inability to enforce the authority of the Dominion would be painfully exhibited, not only to the people of Red River, but to the people and government of the United States. An assumption of the government by you, of course, puts an end to that of the Hudson's Bay Company's authorities and Governor McTavish and his council would be deprived even of the semblance of legal rights to interfere. There would then be, if you were not admitted into the country, no legal government existing, and anarchy must follow. In such a case, no matter how the anarchy is produced, it is quite open to the law of nations for the inhabitants to form a government *ex necessitate* for the protection of life



and property and such a government has certain sovereign rights by the *jus gentium* which might be very convenient for the United States but exceedingly inconvenient to you. The temptation to an acknowledgment of such a government by the United States would be very great and ought not to be lightly risked. We have formally notified the colonial office by cable of the situation of affairs and stated the helplessness and inaction of the Hudson's Bay authorities. We have thrown the responsibility on the Imperial Government and they will doubtless urge the Hudson's Bay people by cable to take active and vigorous steps. Meanwhile your course has been altogether right. By staying at Pembina you will be at an easy distance from the Territory and can, it is hoped, often communicate singly or otherwise with the insurgent leaders. We intend to send up to you the Very Rev. Mr. Thibault and Charles de Salaberry, who both know the country well, are strongly in favor of the Dominion government, and have, it is said, some influence with the half-breeds. If they do not do you any good, they can do you no harm. We shall also send you James Ermatinger, who is a half-breed Chipewaiian, speaks the language, and who was formerly employed in a similar work of pacification. You may find him of use also.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile the imperial government had prepared a royal proclamation, which was transmitted to the Canadian government and then forwarded to Governor McTavish. It makes clear the attitude of the British government:

The Queen has heard with surprise and regret that

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<sup>18</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, November 27; Letter Book 13, p. 614-6



certain misguided persons have banded together to oppose by force the entry of the future lieutenant-governor into her settlements on the Red River. Her majesty does not distrust the loyalty of her subjects in these settlements, and can only ascribe to misunderstanding or misrepresentation their opposition to a change which is plainly for their advantage. She relies on your government for using every effort to explain whatever is misunderstood, to ascertain the wants and to conciliate the goodwill of the Red River settlers. But meantime she authorizes you to signify to them the sorrow and displeasure with which she views these unreasonable and lawless proceedings, and her expectation that if any parties have desires to express or complaints to make respecting their condition and prospects, they will address themselves to the governor-general of the Dominion of Canada.

The Queen expects from her representative that, as he will be always ready to receive well-founded grievances, so he will exercise all the power and authority with which she has entrusted him in the support of order, and for the suppression of unlawful disturbances.<sup>14</sup>

—GRANVILLE—

Forwarding this message, the governor-general informed McTavish that, "Every claim or complaint which may be put forward will be attentively considered, and the inhabitants of Rupert's Land, of all classes and persuasions, may rest assured that Her Majesty's government has no intention of interfering with, or setting aside, or allowing others to interfere with or set aside, their religious rights and the franchises which they have hitherto enjoyed or to which they may hereafter prove themselves

<sup>14</sup> B. D., p. 34. Of this message Macdonald wrote (to Cartier), "It is a weak production but can do no harm." (Letter Book 13, p. 586.)

equal."<sup>15</sup> The Canadian attitude was also expressed, along with the imperial policy, in the royal proclamation issued December 6 and forwarded immediately to McDougall:

To all and every the loyal subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, and to all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

The Queen has charged me, as her representative, to inform you that certain misguided persons in her settlements on the Red River have banded themselves together to oppose by force the entry into her North-Western Territories of the officer selected to administer in her name the government, when the Territories are united to the Dominion of Canada, under the authority of the late Act of the parliament of the United Kingdom; and that those parties have also forcibly, and with violence, prevented others of her loyal subjects from ingress into the country.

Her Majesty feels assured that she may reply upon the loyalty of her subjects in the North-West, and believes those men who have thus illegally joined together, have done so from some misrepresentation.

The Queen is convinced that in sanctioning the union of the North-West Territories with Canada, she is promoting the best interests of the residents, and at the same time strengthening and consolidating her North American possessions as part of the British Empire. You may judge, then, of the sorrow and displeasure with which the Queen views the unreasonable and lawless proceedings which have occurred.

Her Majesty commands me to state to you that she will always be ready through me as her representative to redress all well founded grievances and that she has instructed me to hear and consider

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<sup>15</sup> Young to McTavish, December 6; B. D., p. 34

any complaints that may be made or desires that may be expressed to me as governor-general. At the same time, she has charged me to exercise all the powers and authority with which she has entrusted me in the support of order and the suppression of all unlawful disturbances.

By Her Majesty's authority I do therefore assure you that on the union with Canada all your civil and religious rights and privileges will be respected, your properties secured to you, and that your country will be governed, as in the past, under British laws, and in the spirit of British justice.

I do further, under her authority, entrust and command those of you who are still assembled and banded together in defiance of law peaceably to disperse and return to your homes, under the penalties of the law in case of disobedience.

And I do lastly inform you, that in case of your immediate and obedient dispersion, I shall order that no legal proceedings be taken against any parties implicated in these unfortunate breaches of the law.<sup>16</sup>

John Young

Howe's instructions to McDougall written at this time indicate how the Canadian government stood and what steps it was taking in the face of the insurrection:

I have the honor to inform you that the Very Rev. M. Thibault, accompanied by Charles de Salaberry, Esq., proceeds to-morrow via St. Paul and Pembina to Fort Garry for the purpose of assisting in putting down the unlawful assemblage of people on the Red River and obtaining access for the Canadian authorities into the North-West. . . .

<sup>16</sup> B. D., p. 45-6

With them we send you a proclamation issued by the governor-general by the direct command of Her Majesty . . . It has also been thought well to print copies of your letter of instructions, which will of itself show how unfounded is the charge that the North-West is to be governed without the interposition or aid of the residents, but by Canadians only.

Messrs. Thibault and de Salaberry will be followed by Donald A. Smith, Esq., the Hudson's Bay agent at Montreal. . .

We hope that calmer counsels will soon prevail, and that these misguided people will disperse. So soon as they do, you will, I presume, proceed to Fort Garry and carry out your instructions. . . .

I have the honor to send you also an order in council passed this day on the subject of customs duties. You will now be in a position, in your communication with the residents of the North-West, to assure them:

1. That all their civil and religious liberties and privileges will be sacredly respected.

2. That all their properties, rights, and equities of every kind, as enjoyed under the government of the Hudson's Bay Company, will be continued to them.

3. That in granting titles to land now occupied by the settlers, the most liberal policy will be pursued.

4. That the present tariff of customs duties will be continued for two years, from the 1st of January next, except in the case of spirituous liquors, as specified by the order in council above alluded to.

5. That in forming your council the governor-general will see that not only the Hudson's Bay Company, but the other classes of the residents, are fully and fairly represented.

6. That your council will have the power of establishing municipal self-government at once, and in such a manner as they think most beneficial to the country.

7. That the country will be governed, as in the past, by British law and in accordance with the spirit of British justice.

8. That the present government is meant to be merely provisional and temporary, and that the government of Canada will be prepared to submit a measure to parliament granting a liberal constitution so soon as you as governor and your council have had an opportunity of reporting fully on the wants and requirements of the Territory.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, while McDougall was proceeding to attempt to enforce Canadian authority in the Territory, the Canadian government was turning to the method of negotiation and conciliation. This hasty, but belated, action might have been productive of more beneficial results than it was had it not been for actions of McDougall and for developments in the Settlement itself.<sup>18</sup>

On the same day that McDougall proclaimed himself governor of the North-West Territory, he issued a proclamation to Colonel Dennis, creating him his lieutenant and conservator of the peace, with authority to raise and equip an armed force in the Territory and uphold the power of Canada against the insurgents.<sup>19</sup> On the following day he issued a further proclamation

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<sup>17</sup> Howe to McDougall, December 7; B. D., p. 35-6

<sup>18</sup> v. i., p. 81 et seq.

<sup>19</sup> B. D., p. 110

announcing that public officials holding office at the time of the admission of Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories into Canada should continue to do so.<sup>20</sup> Writing to Howe, McDougall said with regard to these proclamations, "I hope I am right in using the name of her majesty as prominently as I have done."<sup>21</sup>

These documents McDougall executed on Canadian soil, at the Hudson's Bay Company post. This post he planned to barricade and defend with his few men and maintain as his Canadian headquarters.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> B. D., p. 61

<sup>21</sup> McDougall to Howe, December 2; B. D., p. 60

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

## CHAPTER NINE

### Canadian Party Counter-Movement Fails

The conservator of the peace left Pembina at 10.30 o'clock on the evening of November 29. He travelled all that night, all the next day, and all the following night, in the severest of cold weather, and arrived in the Settlement at 5 o'clock on the morning of December 1.<sup>1</sup> After despatching a copy of the proclamation to Winnipeg by Robert Tait,<sup>2</sup> he proceeded to that place himself and arranged conferences with the Canadian party. He found them in a state of anxiety and the public feeling in general in a very excited state. Riel had attempted to intimidate Dr. Schultz, who was in charge of the government supplies, by pointing two-six pounders on his house. The insurgent leader also had seized the printing offices in the town in order to prevent the publication of McDougall's proclamation. Copies of it had to be made by hand.<sup>3</sup>

Dennis then proceeded to occupy Lower Fort Garry, appoint officers in the different parishes, and enrol men in his service. A number of Indians, under their chief, Henry Prince, were included among those engaged in the defence of the Fort. Governor McTavish was requested to furnish him with arms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis to Langevin, February 12; B. D., p. 113

<sup>2</sup> v. s., p. 62

<sup>3</sup> "Record of Proceedings under Commission;" B. D., p. 85 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

A party of 21 Canadians from Winnipeg offered their services to Dennis, but he declined and sent them back home, after enrolling them and arranging for the organization of a company in Winnipeg. Dennis then wrote Dr. Schultz that the Canadian in Winnipeg "were to keep perfectly quiet, and remain in their lodgings, and not to invite either by word or deed any attack from the French; to bear even insult without resenting it, not to fire upon any of the insurgents without being first fired upon." This is Dennis' own account written after the rebellion.<sup>5</sup>

On December 4, Canadians to the number of about fifty assembled at the residence of Dr. Schultz to protect the government supplies. The insurgents, either knowing that this was the purpose of the group, or suspecting that it was to be the nucleus of an attack on Fort Garry, placed the house under a state of siege.

These actions of the Canadians, according to Begg,<sup>6</sup> and the rumor that Dennis was preparing forcibly to oust the insurgents threw the French more strongly together and played into Riel's hands. The French council was deliberating at the time whether to send delegates to McDougall and had even got to the stage of preparing a communication when word was brought that the Canadian party was about to attack Fort Garry. "Like a flash the French rose to a man, negotiations were at an end, and all the good that had been done went for naught."<sup>7</sup> Many of the French who formerly had held aloof from Riel now joined him, and large numbers gathered about the Fort to defend it.

The insurgents next asked Dr. Cowan for the keys to the warehouse, and on his refusal to relinquish them, broke in to the pemmican and balls that were there.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 87

<sup>6</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 411

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*



On December 5 the Bill of the Rights<sup>8</sup> was printed and distributed throughout the Settlement. Its liberal demands won over many of the English and Scotch to Riel. Dennis found difficulty in raising his volunteer companies. He hoped to raise a force of sixty men in St. Andrew's Parish to help relieve Dr. Schultz, but he found he could not secure that many. "There appeared to be an entire absence of the ardour which existed formerly." This was attributed by his advisers to the circulation of the List of Rights, the demands of which were felt to be just.<sup>9</sup>

On the Seventh, Dennis received word of the capture by Riel of the Schultz party and their incarceration in Fort Garry. "Taken altogether, it appears probable," he wrote, "that the resort to arms to put down the French party at the present time must be given up."<sup>10</sup>

The Canadians defending Schultz' house might not have been imprisoned if they had followed Dennis' advice. On December 4 he cautioned both Major Boulton and Dr. Schultz that it was unsafe and unwise for the defenders to remain in their quarters. They were instructed to evacuate the Doctor's residence and repair to Kildonan Parish.<sup>11</sup>

Boulton received Dennis' instructions on the Fourth. The following day he returned to Winnipeg, arriving in the evening. As it was late, the town was quiet, and there were several women in the house, he thought it better to remain for the night. Some of the men were advised of Dennis' instructions. The next day Boulton paid a visit to Dennis, after advising the Canadians to be quiet until he returned. He reached Winnipeg again at about 11 o'clock that night. On the morning of the Sixth, the major as-

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<sup>8</sup> v. s., p. 62-3

<sup>9</sup> B. D., p. 88

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

sembled the officers, gave them the colonel's instructions, and pointed out the futility of remaining on Schultz' property. All agreed to leave, and were commanded to go as soon as possible. Several did so that day, but for some unknown reason the majority remained.<sup>12</sup>

On the following day the French guard around the property was increased. Riel had decided to put an end to this opposition. His evident intention alarmed the citizens of Winnipeg and several of the English party arranged to explain to Dr. Schultz the danger to the whole Settlement in his course and to induce him to withdraw his men. As the party was approaching Schultz' residence, they met Riel and a force of 300 men marching from Fort Garry to oust the Canadians. The insurgents were backed by the cannon of the Fort, which were trained on the house.

William Bannatyne interposed himself as mediator and, accompanied by two of Riel's lieutenants, was permitted to speak to Schultz. Bannatyne conveyed to Schultz Riel's promise of safety to the Canadians should they surrender unconditionally. Schultz protested; the Métis began to lose patience; Mrs. Schultz fainted and went into hysterics. Finally the Canadian leader consented to surrender the party. They were marched to Fort Garry and there kept in close confinement. The insurgents thus disposed of the bitter Canadian opposition.<sup>13</sup>

On December 8, Riel, took a decisive step and issued a declaration of independence from the Hudson's Bay Company and Canada and the announcement of the existence of a provisional government:

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<sup>12</sup> Boulton to Dennis, December 6; B. D., p. 96-7. See also Boulton, Major, "Reminiscences on the North-West Rebellions," p. 78-82

<sup>13</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 74-76; Gunn, D. and Tuttle, C. R., op. cit., p. 369-70

## DECLARATION OF THE PEOPLE OF RUPERT'S LAND AND NORTH-WEST

Whereas it is admitted by all men as a fundamental principle that the public authority commands the obedience and respect of its subjects. It is also admitted that a people, when it has no government, is free to adopt one form of government in preference to another, to give or refuse allegiance to that which is proposed. In accordance with the above first principle, the people of this country had obeyed and respected that authority to which the circumstances surrounding its infancy compelled it to be subject.

A company of adventurers, known as the Hudson's Bay Company, and invested with certain powers granted by His Majesty, Charles II, established itself in Rupert's Land and in the North-West Territory, for trading purposes only. This Company, consisting of many persons, required a certain constitution; but as theirs was a question of commerce only, their constitution was framed in reference thereto. Yet, since there was at that time no government to see to the interests of the people already existing in the country, it became necessary for judicial affairs to have recourse to the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. This inaugurated that species of government which, slightly modified by subsequent circumstances, ruled this country up to a recent date.

Whereas that government thus accepted was far from answering to the wants of the people, and became more and more so as the population increased in numbers and as the country was developed and commerce extended until the present day, when it commands a place amongst the colonies; and this people, ever actuated by the above mentioned principles, had generally supported the aforesaid government and

gave it faithful allegiance; when, contrary to the law of nations, in March, 1869, that said government surrendered and transferred to Canada all the rights which it had pretended to have in this Territory, by transactions with which the people were considered unworthy to be made acquainted; and, whereas it is also generally admitted that a people is at liberty to establish any form of government it may consider suitable to its wants, as soon as the power to which it was subject abandons it, or attempts to subjugate it without its consent to a foreign power and maintained that no right can be transferred to such a foreign power. Now, therefore—

1st. We, the representatives of the people in council, assembled at Upper Fort Garry on the 24th November, 1869, after having invoked the God of Nations, relying on these fundamental moral principles, solemnly declare in the name of our constituents, and in our own names, before God and man, that from the day on which the government we had always respected abandoned us by transferring to a strange power the sacred authority confided to it, the people of Rupert's Land and the North-West became free and exempt from all allegiance to the said government.

2nd. That we refuse to recognize the authority of Canada, which pretends to have a right to coerce us and impose upon us a despotic form of government, still more contrary to our rights and interests as British subjects than was that government to which we had subjected ourselves through necessity up to a certain date.

3rd. That by sending an expedition of 1st November ult., charged to drive back Mr. William McDougall and his companions, coming in the name of Canada to rule us with the rod of despotism, without

a previous notification to that effect, we have acted conformably to that sacred right which commands every citizen to offer energetic opposition to prevent his country being enslaved.

4th. That we continue and shall continue to oppose with all our strength the establishing of Canadian authority in our country under the announced form. And in case of persistence on the part of the Canadian government to enforce its obnoxious policy upon us by force of arms, we protest beforehand against such an unjust and unlawful course; and we declare the said Canadian government responsible before God and men for the innumerable evils which may be caused by so unwarrantable a course. Be it known, therefore, to the world in general and to the Canadian government in particular that as we have always heretofore successfully defended our country in frequent wars with the neighboring tribes of Indians, who are now on friendly relations with us, we are firmly resolved in future not less than in the past to repel all invasions from whatsoever quarters they may come.

And furthermore, we do declare and proclaim in the name of the people of Rupert's Land and the North-West that we have on the said 24th of November, 1869; above mentioned established a provisional government and hold it to be the only lawful authority now in existence in Rupert's Land and the North-West which claims the obedience and respect of the people.

That meanwhile, we hold ourselves in readiness to enter into such negotiations with the Canadian government as may be favorable for the good government and the prosperity of this people.

In support of this declaration, relying on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge

ourselves on oath our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor to each other.

Issued at Fort Garry this 8th day of December in the year of Our Lord, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixty Nine.

JOHN BRUCE, *President*

LOUIS RIEL, *Secretary*<sup>14</sup>

On the same day a company of forty men was dispatched to the Hudson's Bay Post near Pembina to force McDougall across the line again. When the men arrived there, they found McDougall had only gone there to execute his proclamations and had not remained. What would have happened were McDougall and his small party there, we can only conjecture. Would the pages of history record his gallant death while defending himself against rebels?

Shortly afterwards, Dennis decided to give up the attempt to overthrow the insurgents and left the Territory. We have seen how he was becoming convinced that his support was falling away.<sup>15</sup> Dennis received a straightforward letter from Bishop Machray which clearly set forth the situation:

I grieve to say that the state of things is assuming daily a graver aspect. I am greatly disappointed at the manifestations of loyalty and a determination to support the government of Mr. McDougall on the part of the English population. Instead of a breaking down of the force of the insurgents, I feel certain from my observations at Fort Garry today and from information from Mr. McTavish and others I can rely on that over 600 men are now in arms, and they are well armed. I see no reason to depend on

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<sup>14</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," vol I, p. 416-8

<sup>15</sup> v. s., p. 83

want of courage or determination on the part of these men. In addition to this strong exhibition of force there is a belief, apparently on good authority, of a determination to avenge loss of life, if they are attacked, by house to house massacring or, at any rate, by individual assassination. . .

I feel, therefore, that success in an attack with such forces as you bring together with nothing of the common action the insurgents have, is problematical and that the warfare is likely to be such that a victory will only be less fatal to the Settlement and the interest of the Canadian government than defeat.

. . . I would earnestly advise, therefore, the giving up of any idea of attacking the French position at Fort Garry at present and also any idea of seizing by stealth on any rebel (sic). Put away such counsel for a time at least. I feel that the result to be anticipated would be very disastrous. I see everything to be gained by delay. . .

This may not be altogether palatable, but the crisis is a grave one for Canada, and much wisdom is needed. I would not so write did I not feel certain that if the present numbers of insurgents keep up, an attack is not feasible, and did I not also feel that some attempt should be made by those having authority and knowledge to enter into explanations with them before making any attack. The late government of Assiniboia could not do this, for it had no information; all that could be done was to counsel loyal obedience, but at this time something more is called for than that.<sup>16</sup>

Denis therefore became convinced "that it is useless longer to entertain any expectation of being enabled to get a reliable force with which to put down the party in

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<sup>16</sup> Machray, R., op. cit., p. 181-2

arms." He decided to make a last peaceful attempt to solve the problem and induce the French to send delegates to confer with McDougall. <sup>17</sup> Accordingly, he indited the following message:

To all whom it may concern:

By certain printed papers of late put in circulation by the French party, communication with the lieutenant-governor is indicated, with a view to laying before him alleged rights on the part of those now in arms.

I think that course very desirable, and that it would lead to good results.

Under the belief that the French party are sincere in their desire for peace, and feeling that to abandon for the present the call on the loyal to arms would, in view of such communication, relieve the situation from much embarrassment and so contribute to bring about peace and save the country from what will otherwise end in universal ruin and devastation, I now call on and order the loyal party in the North-West Territory to cease from further action under the appeal to arms by me, and I call on the French party to satisfy the people of their sincerity in wishing for a deputation to the lieutenant-governor at Pembina without unnecessary delay.

Given under my hand at Pembina at the Lower Fort Garry, this 9th day of December, 1869.

J. S. DENNIS <sup>18</sup>

Finding that there was no disposition on the part of the insurgents to send a delegation to McDougall, Dennis moved out of the Lower Fort, disbanded his forces, and returned to Pembina.

<sup>17</sup> Record of Proceedings, B. D., p. 89

<sup>18</sup> B. D., p. 98



On Friday, December 10, the insurgents raised the flag of the provisional government over Fort Garry. The cannon were fired in celebration, and the guard at Schultz's house returned the salute. The band played several rousing tunes. Riel addressed the men at Fort Garry, urging all to hold loyalty to the Queen. Three cheers were given for the leaders of the government. Thus was inaugurated the provisional government of Assiniboia.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 88

## CHAPTER TEN

### McDougall's Last Activities in Pembina

McDougall in Pembina was still waiting the issue of events, which he hoped would be accelerated now that his lieutenant was busy in the Settlement. "I fell very confident," he wrote, "that this display of vigour and determination to assist and maintain by force, if need be, the authority of the new government from the day and hour of its expected birth will inspire all the inhabitants of the Territory with respect for your representation and compel the traitors and conspirators to cry, 'God save Queen' or beat a hasty retreat."<sup>1</sup>

McDougall hoped that he had the hearty support of the cabinet. He had received Howe's letter of November 19,<sup>2</sup> which appeared to commend his actions. Nevertheless, he had misgivings, for he wrote in the same letter quoted from above: "I must trust that the same necessity will be my justification, if I have committed an error in assuming that the transfer of the Territory to the Dominion actually did take place on the 1st December, and that my commission came into force at the same time."

Indeed, he might well have misgivings. Howe's despatch of November 19 also had said very clearly and explicitly, "as matters stand you can claim or assert no

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<sup>1</sup> McDougall to Howe, December 6; B. D., p. 62-3

<sup>2</sup> v. s., p. 42

authority in the Hudson Bay Territory until the Queen's proclamation annexing the country to Canada reaches you through this office."

The whole trouble was that McDougall was straightforwardly following out the simple plan of occupation which the Canadian government in its ignorance and carelessness had thoughtlessly formulated for the transfer, while the government now was belatedly resorting to cautious negotiation. He was to wake up to this when he received Macdonald's letter of November 27<sup>8</sup> and the minutes of the privy council for December 16. A few quotations from the latter will make clear the position of the cabinet. The opening items, in which the cabinet expresses surprise at the insurrection and nonchalantly lays the blame on the Hudson's Bay Company, may be disregarded.

Any hasty attempt by the Canadian government to enforce their rule upon the insurgents would probably result in armed resistance and bloodshed. Every other course would be tried before resort is had to force. If life were once lost in an encounter between a Canadian force and the inhabitants, the seeds of hostility to Canada and Canadian rule would be sown, and might create an ineradicable hatred to the union of the countries, and thus mar the future prosperity of British North America.

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From a sincere conviction of the gravity of the situation and not from any desire to repudiate or postpone the performance of any of their engagements, the Canadian government have urged a temporary delay of the transfer.

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<sup>8</sup> v. s., p. 73-4

It is better to have the semblance of a government in the country than none at all. While the issue of a proclamation would put an end to the government of the Hudson's Bay Company, it would not substitute the government of Canada; therefore, such a government is physically impossible until the armed resistance is ended; and thus a state of anarchy and confusion would ensue, and a legal status might be given to any government *de facto* formed by the inhabitants for the protection of their lives and property.<sup>4</sup>

On a review of the whole circumstances, the committee would recommend that your excellency should urge upon Her Majesty's government the expediency of allowing matters to remain as they are until quiet is restored, or, in case of failure of all effort to do so, the time shall have arrived when it is possible to enter the country in force and compel obedience to Her Majesty's proclamation and authority.<sup>5</sup>

On the following day Howe wrote McDougall to say:

You will, until further advised, abstain from all movements in excess of your authority and do nothing by which the governor and officers of the Hudson's Bay Company may be relieved of the responsibility which now rests upon them.<sup>6</sup>

Prominently occupying McDougall's time during his last days in Pembina were the charges that he was enlisting the aid of the savages in attempting to suppress the Red River insurrection. On December 6 the St. Paul "Press" carried a story from Pembina which said, "However incredible it may appear, it is nevertheless true that Governor McDougall is willing to enlist savages in order

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<sup>4</sup> The formation of a *de facto* government is exactly what occurred.

<sup>5</sup> B. D., p. 53

<sup>6</sup> Howe to McDougall, December 17; B. D., p. 59

to force his yoke upon a Christian people. At Winnipeg I learned that McDougall's emissaries were using every effort to induce the Swampy Indians near the mouth of the Red River to declare for Canada and take up arms in favor of McDougall.<sup>7</sup>

McDougall himself was taken to task by prominent officials in Pembina, men who lived continually in dire fear of the savages. His critics seem to have been highly excited and pointed out to him the extreme danger of Indian warfare. One declared that "in such an event I and my party would find ourselves in the hottest place we had ever been in."<sup>8</sup>

These reports were occasioned by Dennis' enrolment of the fifty Indians at the Lower Fort. Rumors were rife in Winnipeg, in the Settlement, and throughout the British and American north-west that the terrible Sioux Indians were going on the warpath.<sup>9</sup> McDougall had no intention of calling upon the natives to fight his battles against white men, and he was greatly perturbed by these rumors. He did his best to convince the Americans that he had no intentions of using Indians and stirring up a deadly inter-racial war, and he instructed Dennis to dispense with the services of such Indians as he had in his employ.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, all that McDougall could do to quell the rebellion and assert Canadian authority was to receive reports on the state of affairs in the Territory. He was disappointed and disgruntled to learn that his lieutenant and conservator of the peace was achieving practically nothing.<sup>11</sup> The man who had ambitions of being a lieutenant-governor was losing all his optimism—little wonder! By December 16 he had reached the decision that

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<sup>7</sup> Dwight to Macdonald, December 19; Macdonald Papers, vol 2, p. 256

<sup>8</sup> McDougall to Nelson, December 8; B. D., p. 69

<sup>9</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 58; and Dwight's letter cited above

<sup>10</sup> McDougall to Dennis, December 8; B. D., p. 70

<sup>11</sup> McDougall to Howe, December 13; B. D., p. 71

his case was hopeless and that he had best retire with as much grace as he could. This decision was no doubt aided by newspaper reports that the purchase money had been withheld from the Company by the Dominion and the idea which probably began to dawn in his mind that he had no authority in the Territory.

Before quitting Pembina, he made a single, half-heard overture to Riel. Hearing that the insurgent leader was to be at the Hudson's Bay post near Pembina, he wrote suggesting an interview and at the same time threatening dire consequences to continued recalcitrance:

. . . I send this note to inform you that I am anxious to have a conversation with you before answering despatches which I have recently received from Dominion government.

I have not had yet any communication from you or from any one else on behalf of the French half-breeds, who have prevented me from proceeding to Fort Garry, stating their complaints or wishes in reference to the new government.

As the representative of the sovereign to whom you and they owe, and, as I am told, do not wish to deny, allegiance, it is proper that some such communication should reach me. It will be a great misfortune to us all, I think, if I am obliged to return to Canada and hand over the powers of government here to a military ruler.

This will be the inevitable result unless some solution of the present difficulty is found very soon.

I have full powers from the government as well as the strongest desire personally to meet all just claims of every class and section of the people. Why should you not come to me and discuss the matter?

I beg you to believe that what occurred will not affect my mind against you or those for whom you may be authorized to speak.

The interview proposed must be without the knowledge or privity of certain American citizens here who pretend to be en rapport with you.

I trust to your honor on this point.<sup>13</sup>

This letter was never answered.

McDougall's final act was to write McTavish a letter which, no doubt, he thought was very clever, and which was intended to shoulder the responsibility on the ill governor:

Under these circumstances, it becomes important to consider carefully the legal position of all parties in the present crisis. I venture to submit my views of the case as it stands in the North-West Territories.

If, in consequence of the action of the Dominion government, the surrender and transfer of the country did not take place on the first day of December, as previously agreed upon, then you are the chief executive officer as before and responsible for the preservation of peace and the enforcement of law and order.

If, on the other hand, the transfer did take place on the first day of December, then, I take it, my commission came into force, and the notice in the form of Proclamation issued by my authority on that day correctly recited the facts and disclosed the legal status of the respective parties.

It will be clearly evident that McDougall was acting like the man who is trying to hold on to one job while he surreptitiously attempts to secure another one; he is dishonest with his employer and is seeking only his own self-interest. The despatch continues:

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<sup>13</sup> McDougall to Riel, December 13; B. D., p. 72-3

I learn from Colonel Dennis that a notice or proclamation issued by me on the 2nd day of December, confirming and continuing all public officers in the duties and functions was duly printed and published in the Settlement, although it was reported here that the messenger who carried it forward was arrested and his papers taken from him by Riel's party. You will observe by reference to the 5th section of the Rupert's Land Act that "until otherwise enacted by the parliament of Canada" all the powers, authorities, and jurisdiction of the several courts of justice now established in Rupert's Land and the several offices thereof, and of all magistrates and justices, are continued in full force, and by the 6th section of the Canadian Act "for the temperate government of Rupert's Land," & c., "all public officers and functionaries holding offices in Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories shall continue to be public officers and functionaries of the North-West Territories, with the same duties and powers as before, unless otherwise ordered by the lieutenant-governor.

My proclamation of the 2nd instant, intended to notify all these officers that I had not "otherwise ordered," and that by force of both Acts they still held and were bound to exercise their "powers, jurisdiction, and duties" as before. Whether the transfer has been delayed or not, I think it is clear that the present magistrates and authorities are still legally in office and bound, as far as they can, to perform the duties of their respective offices as before.<sup>13</sup>

This makes clear McDougall's craftiness and also his real incompetence. The real reason for his proclamation of December 2 was no generous assurance that office-holders would continue in their positions without fear of

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<sup>13</sup> McDougall to McTavish, December 16; B. D., p. 75



losing their salaries when the new administration came into force; it was a dodge by which McDougall reassured himself that responsibility for the Red River Settlement would be put on other shoulders should his mission fail and he should have to retire. No sign of apology for usurping authority that did not belong to him is seen in this letter. Nor is there apparent any recognition of the obvious fact that the insurgents were in complete control and that the Company officials had absolutely no authority or power.

Finally, disappointed and chagrined, McDougall betook himself to St. Paul, milling over the events in his mind and rationalizing his activities en route. He arrived there December 31, after having met Donald A. Smith.

McDougall's mission had been a dismal failure, but he felt that he had done his duty and conducted himself to the best of his ability. The blame for the insurrection and his failure to assert Canadian authority in the Territory he laid first upon the Roman Catholic clergy and then upon American conspirators, principally Colonel Stutsman. He was beginning to suspect that he had over-played his accredited powers and that his confreres in Ottawa had reversed their policy, and he was inclined to resent this. When he learned the whole truth of the situation, he was later to resent his colleagues' actions very bitterly and publicly to blame them for all the difficulties in the Red River district.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McDougall to Macdonald, January 20; Macdonald Papers, vol 2, p. 485-92

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### The Insurgents Establish Themselves in Power

Now that McDougall and Dennis had disappeared from the scene, the Settlement became more quiet and the provisional government proceeded to administer the affairs of the Territory. The provisional government, it is true, was not a representative government, for the English-speaking delegates had dispersed and gone back to their homes. The government was practically a dictatorship of the Métis.

The first consideration of the new administration was the disposition of the Canadian prisoners. The original number had been added to by frequent more or less secret arrests until the aggregate of prisoners was now about sixty. The prisoners were kept under strict surveillance and no parcels were allowed in to them without first being searched. No letters or papers were permitted to be sent them or taken from them. They were kept in miserably close confinement. Rumor had it that eventually some would be deported and that the remainder would be paroled. But the deliberations of the French council were kept secret, and the prisoners remained in confinement without any hope of liberation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 91-103, *passim*

There was some indignation at the severity of the treatment accorded the prisoners, but since the Canadian party had earned the opprobrium of the Settlement, little opposition to the provisional government was aroused. The new government was the talk of the district after its inception. At first, the English-speaking portion apathetically looked on, but more and more they came to feel that in it lay the hope of peace and order in the Territory since the Company was *hors de combat*. Especially did the English feel inclined to support the provisional government when they learned that McDougall's proclamation had been issued without authority. They felt that they had been "sold out." Riel had denied that the Fenian element was influencing the Métis and said that the provisional government was only a basis for treating with Canada; he had stated that he would be glad if, when the government was fully formed, either Governor McTavish or Judge Black would head it. On December 21 Alexander Begg entered in his "Journal," "It is thought that the balance of the Settlement will now go in for the provisional government very soon."<sup>2</sup>

Louis Riel and his administration in the meantime were becoming pressed for money. Riel had continually employed large bodies of guards at the Fort and in Winnipeg and had guaranteed them fixed wages. By the middle of December he must have been getting into serious financial difficulties, for we find him going to Governor McTavish and demanding, in the name of the provisional government, a loan of £1000. McTavish refused to entertain the proposition, but succeeded in deferring a definite answer. On the 22nd, Riel increased his demand to £10,000, and McTavish accordingly accentuated his refusal to supply the money.

Leaving the sick room, Riel and O'Donohue, who had accompanied him, proceeded to the office, ordered Ac-

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<sup>2</sup> loc. cit.

countant J. H. MacTavish arrested, took, possession of the keys, and opened the safe. From it they extracted all its contents, amounting £1090, 4s in Hudson's Bay notes and American currency. Two days later John Bruce seized a large quantity of goods from the sale shop and used them to pay the insurgent forces. Governor MacTavish estimated the total losses to the Company at £4,000 to date.<sup>3</sup>

The provisional government, feeling itself in need of an organ to express its views, also established a newspaper, the "New Nation." Its publication was made possible principally by funds supplied from Stutsman and Robinson, the latter who became editor. Both were Americans, and the new paper from its beginning loudly vociferated the annexation doctrine. The editorial pronouncement in its first issue said:

Something as to our policy will be expected from us in this number, and we proceed briefly to define our position. In common with the majority of this Settlement we regard the Hudson's Bay Company's government as absolute and near to be resuscitated. The Dominion government, by its criminal blunders and gross injustice to this people, has forever alienated them and by its forfeiture of all rights to our respect will prevent us in future from either seeking or permitting its protection. The imperial government we consider to be too far distant to intelligently administer our affairs. The question arises then what form of government is best adapted [for the development?] of this country, and we reply unhesitatingly that the United States republic offers us today that system of government which would best promote order and progress in our midst and open up rapidly a country of magnificent resources, but in our present dependent position we cannot obtain what we

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<sup>3</sup> MacTavish to W. G. Smith, December 25; B. D., p. 201

need in that direction, and hence we will hold it to be our duty to advocate independence for the people of Red River as a present remedy for public ills. Our annexation to the United States will follow in time and bring with it the advantages this kind of province requires. <sup>4</sup>

On December 25, Louis Riel, the real leader of the insurrection, replaced the figurehead John Bruce as president of the provisional government. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dwight to Macdonald, January 10; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2, p. 446-7

<sup>5</sup> From Bruce's own evidence in the "Trial of Lepine" (p. 62) we know he was a figurehead president. He testified that many things were done without his knowledge or approval: the message ordering McDougall to stop at Pembina, the taking of the Fort, the taking of Schultz' house, etc. He resigned the presidency because "they were going too far and doing things I did not approve of."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Canadian Commission to the Red River

While the provisional government thus was approaching the apogee of its power, a commission of negotiation was en route over the plains from Canada. As we have seen,<sup>1</sup> as soon as the Canadian government heard of the half-breed uprising and the refusal of entry to McDougall, it hastened to arrange for peaceful overtures to the Red River settlers. Macdonald hoped to find a way "to construct a golden bridge over which McDougall can pass into the country."<sup>2</sup> A rapid search was made for men of prestige who commanded the confidence of the Métis, who would be received into the Territory, and who could induce the insurgents to lay down their arms and consider federation with Canada. Georges Cartier, the most prominent French-Canadian member of the government, secured the services of Colonel de Salaberry, who was at the time holding a position with the Quebec government.<sup>3</sup> Hector Langevin, the minister of public works, interviewed Grand Vicar Thibault, who had left the Red River Settlement but a year past, and who agreed to go on the mission of conciliation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> v. s., p. 72 and p. 77

<sup>2</sup> Macdonald to Rose, November 23; Letter Book 13, p. 517

<sup>3</sup> Cartier to Macdonald, November 22; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2, p. 169-70

<sup>4</sup> Langevin to Macdonald, November 26; *ibid.*, p. 178-9

The Grand Vicar was considered the strong member of the Commission and was expected to accomplish much with the half-breeds. Aged about sixty, he had worked in the Settlement for years. He was personally acquainted with "Johnny Bruce," as he called him, and had full confidence that he could treat successfully with the Métis.<sup>5</sup> Cartier was certain that Father Thibault was a very good selection.<sup>6</sup>

De Salaberry, although reputed to be something of a hero among the half-breeds,<sup>7</sup> seems not to have been a man of the same caliber. Captain Cameron, writing from Pembina after hearing that the Commission was to proceed to the Red River, informed Macdonald with regard to De Salaberry that, "as it is understood that he is a nobody, I am not sanguine of his mission being successful."<sup>8</sup> Writing later, he said of Father Thibault, "From one or two sources I have heard that (his) influence is likely to be very effective."<sup>9</sup>

But the Grand Vicar's influence did not prove to be very effective. This may be attributed largely to the vagueness of the powers bestowed upon him and his associate:

You will not fail to direct attention of the mixed society inhabiting the cultivated borders of the Red River and Assiniboine to the fact . . . that in the four provinces of this Dominion men of all origins, creeds, and complexions stand upon one broad footing of equality. . .

So far as you may have intercourse with the Indian chiefs and people, you will be good enough to remind

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Cartier to Macdonald, November 29; Macdonald Papers, vol 2, p. 195-6

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, November 23; Letter Book 13, p. 519

<sup>8</sup> Cameron to Macdonald, December 30; *ibid.*, p. 343

<sup>9</sup> same to same, December 30; *ibid.*, p. 343

them that. . . everywhere within Canada the progress of settlement was rendered practicable by treaties and arrangements mutually satisfactory. . .

. . . The proclamation of the Queen's representative, with copies of which you will be furnished in both French and English, will convey to her people the solemn words of their sovereign who, possessed of ample power to enforce her authority, yet confides in their loyalty and affectionate attachment to the throne.

The instructions issued to Mr. McDougall. . . will show how utterly groundless were the suspicions and apprehensions of unfair treatment which have been widely circulated in the North-West. . .

You will perceive that at no time was the absurd idea entertained of ignoring the municipal and political rights of the people of the North-West. . .

. . . The governor-general and his council will gladly welcome the period when the Queen can confer, with their entire approbation, the largest measure of self-government on her subjects in that region compatible with the preservation of British interests on this continent and the integrity of the Empire.

I think it is unnecessary to make more than a passing reference to the acts of folly and indiscretion, attributed to persons who have assumed to represent the Dominion, and to speak in its name, but who have acted on their own responsibility and without the knowledge or the sanction of this government.<sup>10</sup>

It will be seen that Father Thibault's powers were not extensive and that his mission was merely one of friendliness and conciliation. He had no authority to make promises and speak for the Canadian government.

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<sup>10</sup> C. D., p. 45



The man who was entrusted with this authority and to whom was given the responsibility of officially representing the Dominion in negotiations with the people<sup>11</sup> of the Red River Settlement was Donald A. Smith, for many years an official of the Hudson's Bay and at the time superintendent with his office in Montreal.

The Company, had been stirred by the reports of the events at the Red River. Donald A. Smith promptly offered his knowledge and services to the government through George Stephen.<sup>12</sup> Smith travelled to Ottawa at the invitation of Macdonald and presented his information, but offered no helpful idea for the solution of the difficulties in the Territory. He suggested, however, that George Stephen might go on a mission to the Red River.<sup>13</sup> Stephen expressed his willingness to do so, but intimated to Macdonald that he "could do the state better service nearer home, looking after North Lanark, for instance."<sup>14</sup> With this Macdonald agreed,<sup>15</sup> and accordingly, Donald Smith was commissioned to the North-West as plenipotentiary extraordinary for Canada to treat with the insurgent people. The official nature of his commission was not made public; instead, it was announced that he was going to Fort Garry as a Hudson's Bay officer to act for Governor McTavish.<sup>16</sup>

Smith was commissioned as follows:

I have the honour to inform you that His Excellency the governor-general has been pleased to appoint you special commissioner to enquire into and report upon the causes and extent of the armed ob-

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<sup>11</sup> and not the provisional government, note.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen to Macdonald, November 27; Macdonald Papers, vol. 2; p. 187-8

<sup>13</sup> Macdonald to Stephen, December 1; Letter Book 13, p. 630

<sup>14</sup> Stephen to Macdonald, December 6; M. P., vol 2, p. 212

<sup>15</sup> Macdonald to Stephen, December 9; Letter Book 13, p. 674

<sup>16</sup> Smith to Macdonald, December 6; M. P., vol 2, p. 217-8; and Macdonald to McDougall, December 12; Letter Book 13, p. 712

struction offered at the Red River, in the North-West Territories, to the peaceable ingress of the Honourable William McDougall, the gentleman selected to be lieutenant-governor of that country on its union with Canada.

Also to enquire into and report upon the causes of the discontent and dissatisfaction at the proposed change that now exists there.

Also to explain to the inhabitants the principles on which the government of Canada intends to govern the country and to remove any misapprehensions which may exist on the subject.

And also to take such steps, in concert with Mr. McDougall and Governor McTavish, as may seem most proper for effecting the peaceable transfer of the country and the government from the Hudson's Bay authorities to the government of the Dominion. You will consider this communication as your letter of appointment as government commissioner.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Howe to Smith, December 10; B. D., p. 51-2

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### Failure of Thibault and De Salaberry

Commissioners Thibault and de Salaberry left Ottawa on December 8, and Commissioner Smith left that city on December 13 for Fort Garry. They travelled steadily, Smith going the more rapidly. By the time he reached Dakota, he was but one day behind the others. Thibault and De Salaberry met the returning McDougall midway between Georgetown and Pembina. They felt that the circumstances of his departure changed almost entirely the nature of their mission, but nevertheless, they proceeded on their way and arrived at Pembina on December 24. There they found that they were met with distrust and, advised by Cameron and Provencher, they decided that de Salaberry should remain at Pembina with their papers while Thibault left Pembina at 10 o'clock that night. One hour later, Donald Smith arrived there.<sup>1</sup>

The Grand Vicar reached the Settlement on Christmas Day. He was met by Louis Riel at St. Norbert and announced his office as representative of the Canadian government but felt that he should do nothing without De Salaberry. Riel consented to his admission into the

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following two paragraphs are based on Rev. Thibault's letter to Langevin, January 8 in Macdonald Papers, vol. p. 428-35; and Thibault's "Report" to Howe, March 17 in B. D., p. 124-5.

Territory, and he arrived on January 6. Meanwhile, Father Thibault was put in residence at the Bishop's palace and kept under strict surveillance, not being permitted access to any one.

The commissioners turned their papers over to Riel and his council, who at once understood that they were vested with no real authority and were not inclined to pay them much respect. They remained quietly at the Bishop's palace and spoke with such of the leaders and settlers as they came in contact with, but did little to affect the situation.

Travelling to Fort Garry at this time also was Dr. Tupper, president of the council. His journey was not an official one, but solely for the purpose of rescuing his daughter—the wife of Captain Cameron—from the dangers of the wild West. Mrs. Cameron being in “an interesting condition,” Mrs. Tupper was very anxious for her safety and, to quiet her fears and make peace for herself at home, the doctor set out for the West.<sup>2</sup>

Much against Donald Smith's advice,<sup>3</sup> Tupper proceeded to Fort Garry to regain Captain Cameron's furniture, which Riel had seized. Although he had no official connection, he had an interview with Riel and his council. Returning, he met and talked with Père Ritchot, explaining Canada's position and refuting arguments that the proposed union with the Dominion would result in a despotism for the settlers.

All of which was practically useless and even harmful. Tupper was hardly listened to by the insurgents, although the deceitful Ritchot seems to have led him to believe that he had secured a hearing for Thibault and de Salaberry. The only tangible result of his flying visit to the Settlement was to arouse suspicions of intrigue.

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<sup>2</sup> Macdonald to McDougall, December 12; Letter Book 13, p. 715

<sup>3</sup> Smith to Macdonald, December 28; M. P., vol 2, p. 325

Tupper thought highly of his own achievement, as can be seen from his letter to Macdonald,<sup>4</sup> and his account of the adventure in his "Recollections of Sixty Years."<sup>5</sup> A legend seems to have grown up around the heroism of Tupper. We find Sandford Fleming writing to him: "I have a very distinct recollection of your trip to Fort Garry in 1869. In any account of the North-West it should never be forgotten that, by taking your life in your hand on that occasion, you inaugurated the breaking up of the insurrection."<sup>6</sup> His biographer, E. M. Saunders, D. D., ingenuously swallowed it all and wrote as if Tupper had been mainly instrumental in checking the rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> M. P., vol 2, p. 346-8

<sup>5</sup> p. 114-5

<sup>6</sup> "Life and Letters of Sir Charles Tupper," p. 199

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Donald A. Smith Negotiates Successfully

The commissioner who possessed great acumen, tact, courage, and skill in handling people, and who commanded respect was Donald A. Smith. It was he who proved to be the successful intermediary between Canada and the people of the North-West. His "Report" to the secretary of state for the provinces makes most interesting reading.<sup>1</sup>

Smith arrived at Fort Garry on December 27, was met by Riel at the gate, and was promptly ushered in to the council. He informed the insurgents that he was on Hudson's Bay Company business, but that he also held a commission from the Canadian government. He was requested to take an oath not to attempt to upset the provisional government legally established, but he categorically refused to do so. He promised, however, to take no measures immediately to upset forcibly the provisional government, "legal or illegal as it might be."<sup>2</sup>

For almost two months Commissioner Smith remained at Fort Garry. It was not his policy to go outside the Fort, but—what is very surprising—he was permitted to receive visitors from among the prominent persons in the Settlement. He lost no opportunity of impressing upon them

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<sup>1</sup> B. D., p. 151-7

<sup>2</sup> B. D., p. 151. The phrase quoted is not found in Smith's letter to Macdonald written December 28, but was put in the "Report" to contradict charges that he had recognized the provisional government as a legal organization.

the liberal intentions of the Canadian government. These were made known generally to the people in the Settlement. Very soon Smith saw evidence of defections from Riel's council. From this time on the insurgent leader's control declined appreciably. Jealousies seem to have broken out among the leaders,<sup>3</sup> some favoring a connection with Canada or Britain and others advocating annexation.

On January 6, Smith had an interview with Riel and finally came to the conclusion that negotiations with the council would be futile. He had learned that the attitude of the insurgents to Canada was "unquestionably intensely hostile."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, some of the council appeared to believe that the commissioner from Canada ought at least to be given a hearing, and the influence of the English-speaking persons was brought to bear in favor of this policy.<sup>5</sup>

Riel now began to alter his tactics again and to profess a desire for an arrangement with Canada. He intimated that he was anxious for the English to join the French, meet the commissioners, and draw up a list of demands to be secured. These would be despatched to Canada with De Salaberry while in the meantime the united people of the Settlement would form a provisional government for the peace and welfare of the Territory and the better to treat with Canada.<sup>6</sup>

It was during this time—from the 6th to the 13th—that the Grand Vicar Thibault and Colonel De Salaberry were in communication with the council. In the words of Smith, "Some explanations and compliments were exchanged, after which the Very Rev. gentleman and his associate were politely bowed out and lost sight of."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," p. 441

<sup>4</sup> Smith to Macdonald, January 1; M. P. 2, p. 371

<sup>5</sup> same to same, January 8; M. P. 2, p. 425

<sup>6</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 125

<sup>7</sup> B. D., p. 152

On the day after these men were "bowed out" (Jan. 14), Riel paid a call on Smith. The results of that call and the events which succeeded it may be told in Smith's own words:

... He then asked to see my commission, and on my explaining that owing entirely to the action taken by himself it was not in my possession, in an excited yet faltering manner he said, "Yes, I know, 'tis a great pity. But how soon could you have it?" Probably in five or six days," I replied. "That is too long, far too long," he responded, and then asked where the documents were deposited, requesting at the same time a written order for their delivery to his messenger. To this I would not accede, but on his assuring me that they would be delivered into my hands, and that I should be afforded an opportunity of communicating their contents to the people, I consented to send a friend for them. It was so decided, and immediately after the messenger had received his instructions from me, I was placed under strict arrest, a captain's guard being assigned to me, whose instructions were not lose sight of me for one moment day or night and to prevent me from communicating either verbally or in writing with any individual. I protested, saying, "Am I to consider myself a prisoner?" He replied, "Certainly not. I have the utmost confidence in your honor, but circumstances demand this." It was now about 10 o'clock, and my messenger having been marched out, I retired to bed, but only to be awakened 'twixt two and three o'clock in the morning of the 15th by Mr. Riel who, with a guard, stood by the bedside and again demanded a written order for the delivery of my official papers, which I again peremptorily refused to give.



The well affected French party became aware of what had happened, and not believing in Riel's good faith, determined to prevent the papers from falling into his hands. They got together some sixty or eighty men, who met my friend on his way back and were escorting him, when on the 18th, about 10 miles from the Fort, they were accosted by Riel and some of his party, and by the Reverend Mr. Ritchot. An altercation took place; Riel attempted to use his pistol, saying, "he would not be taken alive in his own country," on which a revolver was levelled at his head, and Mr. Ritchot having interposed, he was unceremoniously told to stand aside and "not to interfere any further with matters unconnected with his spiritual duties." It may be well to note that all who took part in this affair were Catholics, and, with one or two exceptions, French half-breeds. Nothing more serious happened at this time, and the party proceed together to Fort Garry, where they arrived in the forenoon.<sup>8</sup>

Smith's documents were now in his possession in the Fort, and if Riel had planned to confiscate them—which apparently he had—he failed. He protested to Smith, "Your commission is here, but in the hands of men who had no right to have it." He and O'Donohue protested to the French who had wrecked their plans, but the ex-councillors accused them of treason and plotting to sell the Territory to the United States. After much recrimination, it was decided to call a public meeting for the morrow at which the papers would be read.

This was Smith's first great coup. He had seen that negotiations with the insurgent council would be useless. The only practical method was to secure a public meeting

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

and place the matter before the people at large. Thus as Canadian commissioner he would deal, not with a disaffected section of the people, but with the people as a whole. It was a masterstroke.

The Métis who had fallen away from Riel expressed their determination no longer to be guided either by Riel or Père Lestanc; but that night Fr. Lestanc called on them and parleyed for several hours. The next morning it was discovered that he had won them over again to Riel.

Messengers were despatched throughout the Settlement, and on January 19 upwards of 1,000 persons gathered at Fort Garry and stood in the open air for five hours, although the thermometer registered twenty degrees below zero. Thomas Bunn was proposed chairman by Riel. The latter was appointed interpreter, and Judge Black was elected secretary.<sup>9</sup>

Donald Smith was introduced, and he read his letter of appointment.<sup>10</sup> He read a letter from the governor-general of Canada, which said:

The people may rely that respect and attention will be extended to the different religious persuasions, that title to every description of property will be carefully guarded, and that all the franchises which have subsisted or which the people may prove themselves qualified to exercise shall be duly continued or liberally conferred.

In declaring the desire and determination of Her Majesty's cabinet, you may safely use the terms of the ancient formula, that right shall be done in all cases.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This account of the mass meeting is based on the reports in the "New Nation" found in B. D., pp. 99-103, and Begg. A., op. cit., pp. 146-58.

<sup>10</sup> v. s., p. 107

<sup>11</sup> Young to Smith, December 12; B. D., p. 58

He then informed the meeting of the existence of letters from the government of Canada addressed to Governor McTavish and the Bishop of Rupert's Land, which had been entrusted to the Grand Vicar. It became evident that O'Donohue had appropriated them. Considerable discussion and confusion followed on this, Riel not wishing that they be produced. But he was not able to dominate the gathering, and the despatches were sent for.

Meanwhile, Smith read Granville's telegram to Young which is found above on page 75. Then, on the meeting being adjourned until the next morning, an English settler initiated a demand for the release of the Canadian prisoners. Riel was unwilling to liberate them at this juncture and replied, "Not just now." Cries of "Yes, yes!" filled the air, whereupon a number of French flew to their arms to defend the Fort. The confusion subsided without a clash and the settlers dispersed.

At noon the following day a still larger assemblage gathered at Fort Garry. Judge Black declined to continue as secretary, and his place was taken by A. G. B. Banatyne.

Père Lestanc addressed the meeting and said, "We have been good friends to this day in the whole Settlement, and I want to certify here that we will be good friends tonight." Smith then proceeded with the reading of his documents. He first presented the letter from Governor Young to Governor McTavish.<sup>12</sup> This was followed by Howe's letter of December 7 to McDougall.<sup>13</sup> with which Smith had been entrusted, and the instructions issued to McDougall on September 28.<sup>14</sup> He then addressed the gathering, declaring:

As reference has repeatedly been made in these papers to Mr. McDougall, I may say that neither

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<sup>12</sup> v. s., p. 75-6

<sup>13</sup> v. s., p. 77-9

<sup>14</sup> v. s., p. 14

P with that gentleman nor any of his party have I any, even the slightest acquaintance, having never seen him nor any of his people, save for a few minutes on the road from Pembina to Georgetown (cheers). . . My commission is simply alone from the government of Canada. Though personally unknown to you, I am as much interested in the welfare of this country as others. . . (cheers). . . I am here today in the interests of Canada but only in so far as they are in accordance with the interests of this country (hear, hear, and cheers). Under no other circumstances would I have consented to act (cheers). . . I will say that if it could do any possible good to the country, I would at this moment resign my position in (the Hudson's Bay Company). I sincerely hope that my humble efforts may in some measure contribute to bring about peaceably union and entire accord among all classes of the people of this land (cheers).<sup>15</sup>

The reading of the above documents made clear to the settlers the general intentions of the Canadian government and the liberality with which it proposed to treat the Territory. Riel himself saw the effect on the people. The events of the last few days had shown him his declining power and impressed upon him the need for a change of tactics. On business being resumed after the reading of the documents, Riel moved that 20 representatives of the British and 20 representatives of the French populations should be elected to meet on the 25th "with the object of considering the subject of Mr. Smith's commission, and to decide what would be best for the welfare of the country." This proposal was adopted by the meeting, and a committee of five was selected to apportion the English representatives for the different parishes and to determine the method of election.

<sup>15</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 154-5

Father Ritchot and Bishop Machray made felicitous comments, and Riel closed the meeting, saying, "Before this assembly breaks up, I cannot but express my feelings, however briefly. I came here with fear. We are not yet enemies, but we came very near being so. As soon as we understood each other, we joined in demanding what our English fellow-subjects in common with us believe to be our just rights; for we all have our rights. We claim no half rights, mind you, but all the rights we are entitled to. Those rights will be set forth by our representatives, and, what is more, gentlemen, we will get them."

On January 20 we find the following entry in Alexander Begg's "Journal": "Good feeling in all parties broke out in noisy joyous demonstrations at the prospect of a speedy union of the whole Settlement."<sup>16</sup>

On January 23 Dr. Schultz effected his escape from Fort Garry, apparently with the aid of outside persons.<sup>17</sup> Through a raging blizzard he fled to the home of R. MacBeth in Kildonan, where he stayed for two days.<sup>18</sup> Although Riel had his guards out with orders to shoot him on sight,<sup>19</sup> Schultz was not taken. He made a remarkable trip overland on snowshoes in company with a half-breed to Fort William, and lived to become lieutenant-governor of Manitoba.

The delegates met on January 25 and continued in session until February 10. The first day was wasted because the French delegates did not appear, and the second day was spent chiefly in settling disputed elections.

Smith's documents were placed in the hands of the chairman of the convention. Riel requested Smith to

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<sup>16</sup> p. 159

<sup>17</sup> Gunn, D. and Tuttle, C., *op. cit.*, p. 381

<sup>18</sup> MacBeth, R. G., "The Romance of Western Canada," p. 130

<sup>19</sup> Young, G., *op. cit.*, p. 120

give his opinion of the List of Rights,<sup>20</sup> but he declined to do so, saying that he would consider only such proposals as came from the convention. Accordingly a committee of six (three English and three French) were appointed to draw up a List of Rights. The convention then commenced to discuss them clause by clause. As finally agreed upon they read as follows:

*"List of Rights"*

1. That in view of the present exceptional position of the North-West, duties upon goods imported into the country shall continue as at present (except in the case of spirituous liquors) for three years, and for such further time as may elapse until there be uninterrupted railroad communication between Red River Settlement and St. Paul, and also steam communication between Red River Settlement and Lake Superior.

2. As long as this country remains a Territory in the Dominion of Canada, there shall be no direct taxation except such as may be imposed by the local legislature for municipal or other local purposes.

3. During the time this country remains a Territory in the Dominion of Canada all military, civil, and other public expenses in connection with the general government of the country,—or that have hitherto been borne by the public funds of the Settlement beyond the receipt of the above mentioned duties, shall be met by the Dominion of Canada.

4. That while the burden of public expense in this country is borne by Canada, the country be governed under a Lieutenant-Governor from Canada, and a legislature, three members of whom being heads of departments of the Government, shall be nominated by the Governor-General of Canada.

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<sup>20</sup> v. s., p. 62-4

5. That, after the expiration of this exceptional period, the country shall be governed, as regards its local affairs, as the provinces of Ontario and Quebec are now governed, by a legislature elected by the people, and a ministry responsible to it, under a Lieutenant-Governor appointed by the Governor-General of Canada.

6. That there shall be no interference by the Dominion Parliament in the local affairs of this Territory other than is allowed in any of the provinces in the Confederation; and that this Territory shall have and enjoy in all respects, the same privileges, advantages, and aids in meeting the public expenses of this Territory as the Confederated provinces have and enjoy.

7. That while the North-West remains a Territory the legislature have a right to pass all laws local to the Territory, over the veto of the Lieutenant-Governor, by a two-third vote.

8. A Homestead and Pre-emption Law.

9. That while the North-West remains a Territory, the sum of 25,000 dols. (twenty-five thousand dollars) a year be appropriated for schools, roads, and bridges.

10. That all public buildings be at the cost of the Dominion treasury.

11. That there shall be guaranteed uninterrupted steam communication to Lake Superior within five years, and also the establishment by rail of a connection with the American railway as soon as it reaches the international line.

12. That the English and French languages be common in the legislature and courts, and that all public documents and Acts of the legislature be published in both languages.

13. That the judge of the supreme court speak the French and English languages.

14. That treaties be concluded between the Dominion and the several Indian tribes of the country as soon as possible.

15. That until the population of the country entitles us to more, we have four representatives in the Canadian Parliament—one in the Senate and three in the Legislative Assembly.

16. That all the properties, rights, and privileges, as hitherto enjoyed by us, be respected; and the recognition and arrangement of local customs, usages, and privileges, be made under the control of the local legislature.

17. That the local legislature of this Territory have full control of all public land inside a circumference, having Upper Fort Garry as the center, and that the radii (sic) of this circumference be the number of miles that the American line is distant from Fort Garry.

18. That every man in this country (except uncivilized and unsettled Indians) who has attained the age of twenty-one years, and every British subject, a stranger to this Territory, who has resided three years in the country, and is a householder, shall have a right to vote at the election of a member to serve in the legislature of the country and in the Dominion parliament; and every foreign subject, other than a British subject, who has resided the same length of time in the country, and is a householder, shall have the same right to vote, on condition of his taking the oath of allegiance—it being understood that this article be subject to amendment exclusively by the local legislature.



19. That the North-West Territory shall never be liable for any portion of the £300,000 paid to the Hudson Bay Company, or for any portion of the public debt of Canada, as it stands at the time of our entering the Confederation; and if, thereafter, we be called upon to assume our share of the said public debt, we consent only on condition that we first be allowed the amount for which we shall be held liable.<sup>21</sup>

Riel desired that the Settlement should enter Canada as a province. This was fully discussed February 4. The convention decided in favor of becoming a territory.

Thus balked, Riel brought forth the following clause to add to the List of Rights:

That all bargains with the Hudson's Bay Company for the transfer of this territory be considered null and void; and that any arrangements with reference to the transfer of this country shall be carried on only with the people of this country.

The proposal was narrowly defeated by a vote of 17 to 22, upon which Riel arose excitedly and exclaimed, "The devil take it! We must win. The vote may go as it likes, but the measure must be carried." Then he spoke in abusive language to three of the French delegates who had voted against his motion. They stood their ground, and one replied boldly, "Let me tell you, Mr. Riel, that I was sent here by my parish. I never sought the position, and, if, as you say, I am lost to public affairs, I should be rather glad of it. You, Mr. Riel, did what you could to prevent my coming here, and failed; and if it suited my purpose to come back again, I would come at the call of my parish in spite of you."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> B. D., p. 157-8.

<sup>22</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," p. 455

Riel acted very strangely during this period. On the 22nd of January he went to the group of passive French and with tears in his eyes told them how earnestly he desired an arrangement with Canada and assured them that he would lay down his authority immediately on the meeting of the convention. Believing him, they went to their parishes for the elections. Hardly had they gone when Riel resorted to autocratic measures, and the Company stores, which had been only partially in his hands, were now taken complete possession of.

We have seen how his desires were thwarted during the convention. On the evening of the defeat of his motion against the Company, according to Smith, Riel proceeded to Governor McTavish, who was barely able to sit up, placed him under guard and, heaping reproaches and insult on him, declared that he would have him shot before midnight. Then he sought out Dr. Cowan, demanded that he swear allegiance to the provisional government, and, when the doctor refused, made him a prisoner. Smith also was put under a strong guard.<sup>23</sup>

On February 7, Smith was given two hours in which to prepare his answers to the List of Rights. This he did under strict surveillance and without recourse to any documents. In his statement to the convention, Smith gave unqualified assurances of agreement on the part of the Canadian government to articles one to five inclusive, nine, eleven to fourteen inclusive, sixteen, eighteen, and nineteen. For the remaining six he expressed the sincere opinion that the Dominion government would provide in a most liberal spirit in such ways as would be acceptable to the people.

He concluded his statement by inviting the convention to send delegates to Ottawa to confer with the Canadian government. On the part of the government he promised

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<sup>23</sup> B. D., p. 153

that the persons sent would be cordially received. This invitation was unanimously accepted, and Judge Black, Père Ritchot, and Alfred Scott were elected delegates.<sup>24</sup>

The convention concluded its sittings on February 10 by forming a provisional government. An English delegation visited McTavish for advice on the question of the provisional government. "Form a government for God's sake!" he exclaimed, "and restore peace and order in the Settlement." On being asked whether he would delegate his authority to another, he replied, "I am dying and will not delegate my power to anyone."<sup>25</sup> Riel desired that the existing government be continued, but this was not done. The new government was to consist of a council of twenty-four and a president. The convention appointed Riel president and nominated various administrative officials. The delegates then dispersed.

As a condition of the formation of a provisional government, Riel had promised to liberate McTavish and Cowan and the Canadian prisoners taken in December.<sup>26</sup> The Company officials were given their freedom along with half a dozen of the other prisoners, but the remainder were kept in confinement. This was probably a mistake in policy on Riel's part. It is true that if liberated the Canadians might have endeavored to wreak vengeance on the insurgent leader, but they had so incurred the animosity and contempt of the other English-speaking persons in the Settlement hitherto that it is doubtful if they could have aroused any sympathy or support. A display of magnanimity on Riel's part at this juncture would have won him the wholehearted support of the populace. Instead, he played the despot.

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<sup>24</sup> appendix to Smith's "Report"; B. D., p. 158-9

<sup>25</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 192

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 195

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Tranquillity Shattered by Terror

Nevertheless, according to Smith's opinion, if it had not been for the rash, though well-intentioned, action of the settlers at Portage la Prairie, the prisoners would have been released, and the Settlement would have remained tranquil.<sup>1</sup> Instead, a virtual reign of terror commenced. Unaware of the progress of events at Fort Garry due to the difficulties of communication in the winter and owing to Riel's stoppage of the mails, a number of settlers there decided to attempt to release the Canadian prisoners by force. Thomas Scott, one of the prisoners, had escaped from the Fort and made his way to Portage la Prairie, which was a portion of the Settlement where there were numerous Canadians resident. His graphic accounts of imprisonment and escape aroused the settlers to a determination to liberate the remaining prisoners.

This unfortunate attempt ruined the chances of union and peace, placed the whole Settlement at the feet of Riel, and occasioned the first flow of blood in the rising, which hitherto had been bloodless. The principal sources of information with regard to this and the immediately consequent episodes are Alexander Begg's "Journal," Major Boulton's reminiscences,<sup>2</sup> and Rev. George Young's memoirs.

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<sup>1</sup> B. D., p. 154

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 100-33

In the first place, the expedition was a foolhardy one. While the insurgents had at this time at least 700 men who were fully armed, garrisoned, and provisioned, the settlers at Portage la Prairie were only 80 or 100 in number, and armed principally with enthusiasm and high motives. Their action at first was deprecated by Boulton,<sup>3</sup> but since they were determined on their project, he entered into it and was elected leader.

On February 12 the party set out for Fort Garry. On the way their number was augmented by settlers at Poplar Point and High Bluff. Headingly was reached by midnight. The people of Winnipeg heard of the approaching party with dismay, for they feared that the appearance of an armed force would ruin the prospects of a peaceable solution of the dilemma. The settlers at Kildonan impressed this upon the group, but they proceeded to take up their position at Kildonan Church. Their force was strengthened considerably by rash enthusiasts who flocked to their assistance, and they were emboldened by the news that a large party was coming from the lower<sup>4</sup> settlements under Dr. Schultz.

At Kildonan the first blood of the disturbance was shed. A moronic<sup>5</sup> young half-breed, Parisien by name, was captured as a suspected spy. Making a bolt from his guard, he grasped a rifle from a nearby cutter, made a dash for the river bank, and, as he reached the stream, shot the son of William (later Senator) Sutherland, who was riding to join his father in the force. Parisien was captured by the infuriated mob and imprisoned by Major Boulton.

Messengers from the advancing force demanded that Riel release the prisoners, and the citizens of Winnipeg urged the same thing. The insurgent leader had been

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<sup>3</sup> Boulton throughout his account describes all his actions as being wise and cautious.

<sup>4</sup> that is, down the river

<sup>5</sup> Healy, W. J., "Women of Red River," p. 221

liberating a few at a time. Faced now with the prospective necessity of holding his power by force of arms, Riel proceeded to release the remainder of the prisoners. They immediately made their way to their friends at Kildonan Church.

Here the force now discussed the advisability of following up the apparent victory with an attempt to oust Riel permanently from the Fort. Such an endeavor on the part of this poorly armed party would have been foolish in the extreme, and its consequences would have been indeed grave. The French and English both were fearful. It was a critical time. Riel would not submit to coercion, and any attempt to attack his force would result in internecine warfare. Fortunately, wiser councils prevailed. Bishop Machray, Archdeacon McLean, and Judge Black put their weight of influence against the enterprise. Finally, Boulton was able to dissuade his men from the attempt.

The greater part of the force dispersed on the afternoon of February 16. The following morning those from Portage la Prairie set out. Their proper course would have been to disband, remain with friends for a short time, and then return singly.<sup>6</sup> Instead, they went as a group and by a route which went a short distance from the Fort. This was what Riel was waiting for. As the party marched on, they were intercepted by a band issuing from Fort Garry and were taken prisoners into the Fort. This was clever treachery on Riel's part, for he previously had promised verbally that "should the opposing party disband, none of them would be molested on their peaceable return to their homes."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, one party of prisoners took the place of another. The explanation is probably to be found in Riel's exasperation at the attempt of the English to defy his authority

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<sup>6</sup> Boulton advocated this course, but was overruled ("Réminiscences," p. 112).

<sup>7</sup> Boulton, Major; *op. cit.*, p. 116

and at their having broken faith with him and taken to arms when he was co-operating peacefully with them in their desire to negotiate with Canada.

Louis Riel was not a man thus to be opposed. Smith had caused defections in his ranks, which he had remedied only by tearful exhortations. His power had been thwarted at the convention. Then had come this attempt to wrest his power from him by force of arms. Something had to be done to rehabilitate his prestige and authority. He would strike terror into his opponents and force co-operation and submission from the English through fear.

Shortly after the Portage la Prairie party was imprisoned, Riel went to the door of Boulton's room and without entering said, "Major Boulton, you prepare to die to-morrow at twelve o'clock." Three others were also sentenced to die. Smith wrote in his "Report" that Boulton was condemned by a court martial,<sup>8</sup> but Boulton says in his memoirs that he was "to be foully murdered without having a trial."<sup>9</sup>

Archdeacon McLean was granted admittance to the prisoner, and he succeeded in gaining a reprieve of twelve hours. During the night Boulton's guard, father of the young man who had shot Sutherland, became mentally unstrung and was found the next morning in a state of lunacy. His successor died that afternoon from apoplexy.

Every effort was put forth by influential persons to secure a reversal of sentence on the doomed men. Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland, parents of the man whom Parisien had shot, came to plead for their lives. Riel was affected and partially granted the petition. "You have saved three lives," he said, "but Captain Boulton must suffer."<sup>10</sup> He was firm and seemed bent on taking the major's life as

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<sup>8</sup> B. D., p. 154

<sup>9</sup> p. 122

<sup>10</sup> Begg, A.; op. cit., vol II, p. 13

an example. It was Donald Smith who succeeded in dissuading Riel from his plan. At first Riel "was obdurate and said that the English settlers and Canadians, but more especially the latter, had laughed at and despised the French half-breeds, believing that they would not dare to take the life of any one, and that, under the circumstances, it would be impossible to have peace and establish order in the country; an example must therefore be made, and he had firmly resolved that Boulton's execution should be carried out, bitterly as he deplored the necessity for doing so."<sup>11</sup> Finally, Riel agreed to spare Boulton's life if Smith would promise to go round the English-speaking settlements and induce the English to elect representatives to the council. He further agreed that, after the united council met, he would release all the prisoners.

A horrible gloom had fallen over the whole Settlement. As Smith wrote in his "Report," "The moment was a fearful one for the Settlement; every man's life was in the hands of Riel."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Donald Smith and Bishop Machray journeyed into the English settlements, where they found no difficulty in encouraging the people to decide to elect delegates to the council.

In the meantime, on the night of the 18th, Riel came to Boulton's room and awoke him from his sleep. "Major Boulton, I have come to see you," he said. "I have come to shake you by the hand and to make a proposition to you. I perceive that you are a man of ability, that you are a leader. The English people, they have no leader. Will you join my government and be their leader?" As may be expected, this overture was a great surprise for Boulton. He suspected treachery and replied in a deceitful way as befitted treachery—to the effect that his proposition was so startling that he could not give an answer at the moment, but if Riel would release all the prisoners and allow him to return to Portage to consult his friends, he would

<sup>11</sup> "Report," loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> B. D., p. 155



consider the proposition seriously. Nothing further came of the matter.<sup>13</sup>

This extraordinary offer may appear to the reader either as a falsehood on the part of Boulton or as a gross mistake of judgment on the part of Riel. Either surmise would be wrong. It is altogether likely that Riel did make such an overture to Boulton, and with good reason, for he needed as an assistant a strong English-speaking leader. Boulton was the only man of the necessary ability and characteristics who could fill the position. He would not be won over. Riel saw that quickly, and the affair was dropped. From a certain point of view there is nothing extraordinary in the incident. The writer knows a shrewd practical politician, whose nature is in many ways similar to Riel's, and who has acted several times as Riel did on this occasion.

On Thursday, February 24, Alexander Begg wrote in his "Journal": "Riel was taken very ill this morning at Hy Coutu's house, being threatened with an attack of brain fever. The priests and sisters visited him, and towards afternoon he became somewhat better—and in the evening he was conveyed to the Fort—Riel's mother was in attendance also."<sup>14</sup>

On the 26th the elections were concluded, and the English had joined with Riel—mainly, be it noted, to save Boulton's life. On that day Riel assured Smith that all the prisoners would be released soon after the first meeting of the council. This promise was repeated two days later. The expected meeting of the council did not materialize, although it became understood that it would occur on March 6 or 7.

Before that date there occurred the horrible event that stained the insurgent movement, a deed for which nothing

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<sup>13</sup> Boulton, Major; op. cit., p. 123-4

<sup>14</sup> vol. II, p. 21

can be said in condonation, extenuation, excuse, or apology for its enormity: the murder—and even the calm historian can call it nothing but a murder—of Thomas Scott on March 4.<sup>15</sup>

Nothing, we repeat, can be said in extenuation of this dastardly crime, unless we attribute it to a temporary insanity on the part of Riel. Since the defining of insanity is a very intricate business, and we are not qualified to do so, that question cannot be gone into here. It may or may not be assumed by the reader that any one who would commit or order to be committed such a deed must be insane.

The murder of Scott had far reaching effects on the immediate situation in the Settlement, on the negotiations with which Archbishop Taché was charged with,<sup>16</sup> and on the people of Canada. It is one of the most important, while at the same time most unfortunate, event of the insurrection.

Various reasons have been given for the murder. Boulton puts forth the theory that Scott had opposed a Rielite who had come to solicit votes in the prison, and that this action enraged Riel against him.<sup>17</sup> This would seem a rather flimsy excuse for killing a man. Nevertheless, there may be some truth in it—more than Boulton realized. Only a few years later Riel was admitted into a mental hospital to be treated for insanity, the form of which he suffered from being megalomania.<sup>18</sup> In this disease the aberrant person has an obsession of greatness and brooks no opposition or frustration. When contradicted or opposed he becomes irritable or even violent.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Principal sources of information are Smith's "Reports," Rev. George Young's "Manitoba Memories," the "Trial of Lepine," and Boulton's "Reminiscences."

<sup>16</sup> v. i., p. 137 et seq.

<sup>17</sup> op. cit., p. 126-7

<sup>18</sup> "Queen vs Riel" p. 120

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

These characteristics Riel exhibited more or less throughout his life.<sup>20</sup> It is possible that the disease was developing at the time of the Red River rebellion and that the occasion of the murder of Scott was an outburst of insanity.

A close study of all the evidence available reveals only two possibilities as reasons or causes for the murder of Scott if the insanity plea is disregarded. It may have been because of insulting language which Scott appears to have used to his guards and to Riel<sup>21</sup> and for which Riel wished to have revenge and because of which Riel wished to make an example of stern discipline. On the other hand, the murder may have been perpetrated in order to cower the settlers and, as J. A. Chapleau suggests, "to throw a dead body between his brother half-breeds and the conciliation which the holy missionary (Taché) was bringing with him."<sup>22</sup>

Ambroise Lepine, the adjutant-general, had told John Bruce a fortnight before the execution that the prisoners were to be liberated, but that "we will put a couple to death before releasing them."<sup>23</sup> Bruce thought that he was not in earnest. Just before the murder, the "New Nation" commented on the state of affairs: "It is highly unlikely that the interference of anyone would be for a moment tolerated."<sup>24</sup> Archbishop Taché was at hand, Riel feared his power to intervene and prick his bubble of personal ambition, and he may have taken this drastic means of preventing his deposition.

Scott was given a mock trial on March 3 before a court over which Lepine presided. Riel, according to Joseph, secretary of the adjutant-general, was the only accuser,

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<sup>20</sup> "Queen vs Riel," *passim*

<sup>21</sup> Riel, L., "Execution of Thomas Scott," *Can. Hist. Rev.*, vol VI, p. 235

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Martin, C. in "Canada and its Provinces, vol XIX, p. 89, from "The Riel Question"

<sup>23</sup> "Trial of Lepine, p. 59

<sup>24</sup> Martin, C., *op. cit.*, p. 87

"the only man who spoke." The prisoner was charged with insubordination and with being false to his oath. He was condemned by a vote of five out of seven, after which Riel announced the sentence of death and the time and place of the execution. All was done in French, a language which Scott did not understand.<sup>25</sup>

Rev. John Young was appealed to by Scott, and he attempted to get influential persons to bring pressure to bear on Riel in this case as they did for Boulton; but "they one and all regarded it as a scare only and did not interfere."<sup>26</sup> He pleaded with Riel first for the prisoner's life and, when that was refused, for a respite to prepare him for eternity. That, too, was unavailing. Major Boulton spoke to Riel and said, "Don't you think you are doing a most imprudent act for your own safety in shooting Scott? Don't you know enough about history to realize that England has never yet left the most remote region unpenetrated to punish those who take the life of a British subject?"<sup>27</sup> Donald Smith reasoned with the insurgent leader. He remained obdurate. "I have done three good things since I have commenced," he declared. "I have spared Boulton's life at your instance, and I do not regret it, for he is a fine fellow; I pardoned Gaddy,<sup>28</sup> and he showed his gratitude by escaping out of the bastion, but I don't grudge him his miserable life; and now I shall shoot Scott."<sup>29</sup>

At noon, March 4, Scott was led out and executed. He was pierced by two or three shots<sup>30</sup> which did not cause immediate death. A revolver shot in the head caused the death agony to cease. The ground was red with blood when Scott was lifted and placed in his rude wooden coffin.

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<sup>25</sup> "Trail of Lepine," p. 58

<sup>26</sup> Young, G.; op. cit., p. 134-5

<sup>27</sup> Boulton, Major; op. cit., p. 128

<sup>28</sup> one of the leaders of the Portage party

<sup>29</sup> B. D., p. 156

<sup>30</sup> according to different witnesses; see "Trial of Lepine"

Weird and gruesome rumors later arose regarding this incident. It was said that Scott had not been properly executed and was placed in his coffin while still alive. Bruce wrote to the newspapers, according to Boulton:

Scott was still not dead, but that did not prevent his butchers from placing him, alive and still speaking, in a kind of coffin made of four rough boards. It was nailed and plated in the south-eastern bastion, and an armed soldier was placed at the door. This would seem like a story made at one's ease, if there were not several credible witness who, between the hours of five and six in the evening, heard the unfortunate Scott speaking from under the lid of his coffin, and it was known that he had been shot at half-past twelve. What a long and horrible agony, and what ferocious cruelty was this on the part of his butchers! The words heard and understood by the French Métis were only these: "My God! My God!" Some English Métis, and those understanding English, heard distinctly these words: "For God's sake, take me out of here or kill me." Towards eleven o'clock—that is, after ten and one half hours of frightful agony—a person whose name I shall withhold for the present went into the bastion and, according to some, gave him the finishing stroke with a butcher's knife; with a pistol, according to others. After having inflicted the last blow on poor Scott, that person said, as he was coming back from the bastion: "He is dead this time." The corpse was left for a few days in the south-eastern bastion, being guarded by the soldiers, relieving each other in turn.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Boulton, Major; *op. cit.*, p. 131. Bruce later declared that this was a garbled account ("Trial of Lepine," p. 63).

Credit was loaned this idea by the fact that both Rev. Young and Bishop Machray were refused permission to bury the body. As far as we can learn, it was sunk in the Red River.<sup>32</sup>

This account of the manner of Scott's death may or may not be true, and it must be discounted to the degree in which the half-breeds were credulous in believing and retailing such stories. Nevertheless, it is important for the effect it had on the people of Ontario. The story of the murder of Orangeman Scott, who was done to death by Catholic Métis, embellished by such lurid details, greatly inflamed the passions of the people of that province—especially when the chief perpetrator of the deed was being allowed to go his freedom.<sup>33</sup>

The execution of Scott, in the words of Cartier, who was sympathetic to the insurgents, "was, to say the least of it, an act of excessive abuse of power and of cruel brutality."<sup>34</sup> It threw the whole Red River Settlement into a frenzy of horror and fear. With this dreadful tragedy came an end to all hope of rapprochement between the French and the English. According to Begg,<sup>35</sup> Riels's power and influence declined even with his own people, as well it might.

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<sup>32</sup> Bruce's evidence in "Trial of Lepine"

<sup>33</sup> Riel was given financial assistance from Macdonald to help him leave Canada and thus remove an embarrassment from the Conservative Party in 1872 ("Causes of Difficulties," p. 53 et seq.)

<sup>34</sup> C. D., p. 172

<sup>35</sup> "History of the North-West," p. 469

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### Mission of Bishop Taché

On March 8 the Bishop of St. Boniface arrived in the Settlement and was conveyed to the palace, where he was kept under a guard. Bishop Taché was accredited with full powers from the Canadian government to negotiate for a conciliation with the insurgents, to make a peaceable settlement of the troubles, and to grant a full amnesty. He was instructed to act entirely on his own discretion as the situation demanded. He was the last card, as it were, Canada had to play.

Before Taché's departure for Rome, Langevin had asked him if he would be willing to return if it was found that his services would be of advantage at Red River, and if the government requested him to do so. He replied that he would. While in Paris the Bishop learned that trouble had broken out in the Settlement. On December 27 in Rome, Bishop Langevin of Rimouski presented him a letter from Hector Langevin, which alluded to the difficulties at Red River and expressed a desire that he should return to Canada. Taché felt that it would be useless to return for he "was not likely to receive any means of pacifying the people," which he felt "in consequence of the reception I had met with in passing through Ottawa." Nevertheless, he gave Bishop Langevin to understand that he would return if the government asked him to. Bishop Langevin telegraphed Hector Langevin

to that effect, and on January 8 he received the following reply:

Tell Bishop Taché government of Canada gladly accept his patriotic offer to go to Fort Garry and request his immediate return; his expenses will of course be paid. Answer.

HECTOR L. LANGEVIN

Bishop Taché indited a response:

At request of government of Canada, Bishop Taché leaves this week if possible.

BISHOP LANGEVIN

On January 13 Bishop Taché left Rome for America, where he arrived (at Portland) on February 2. On his arrival, he found the following letter from Cartier, which made amends for the latter's curtness the summer before in Ottawa:

The few lines which I now address your Lordship will meet you on your arrival at Portland. I must at once express to your Lordship the gratitude which my colleagues as well as myself feel for the readiness with which you have so graciously and patriotically offered your invaluable services to assist the government of Canada in quieting the troubles which exist at Red River and for the promptitude with which you have returned to this side of the Atlantic to meet the views of the government. . .

On February 9 the bishop reached the capital and received his commission for the Red River.<sup>1</sup>

The verbal instructions given him seemed clear to the bishop. "They were," he later testified, "that I was to do all I could to quiet public excitement, and assure the

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<sup>1</sup> This section based on Taché's evidence in the "Causes of Difficulties," p. 8-16, *passim*



people that they would be well treated by Canada. I was always assured that an amnesty would be granted, and that the government would be only too glad to grant one if the people would submit."<sup>2</sup> The bishop in conversation with the prime minister reminded him, "This is all very well, but there have been acts committed which are blameworthy, and there may be some others before my arrival there. May I promise them an amnesty?" Macdonald answered, "Yes, you may promise it to them."<sup>3</sup> It was clearly understood that "the proclamation of Sir John Young of December 6<sup>4</sup> should have all the force the day I arrived at Red River that it had the day it was given me."<sup>5</sup>

Macdonald summed up his instructions to Taché in a letter which he wrote him on February 16:

Before you leave Ottawa on your mission of peace, I think it well to reduce to writing the substance of the conversation I had the honor to have with you this morning.

I mark this letter "private" in order that it may not be made a public document to be called for by Parliament prematurely, but you are quite at liberty to use it in such a manner as you may think most advantageous.

You will be kind enough to make full explanation to the council of Assiniboia<sup>6</sup> on behalf of the Canadian government as to the feelings which animate, not only the Governor-General, but the whole government, with respect to the mode of dealing with the

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>3</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *v. s.*, p. 76-7

<sup>5</sup> "Causes of Difficulties," p. 18

<sup>6</sup> In paragraph three, which has been omitted, Macdonald hoped that the insurrection would have ceased and the council of Assiniboia would have been restored to power.

North-West. We have fully explained to you and desire you to assure the council authoritatively that it is the intention of Canada to grant to the people of the North-West the same free institutions which they themselves enjoy.

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In case a delegation is appointed to proceed to Ottawa, you can assure them that they will be kindly received and their suggestions fully considered. . .

You are authorized to state that the two years during which the present tariff shall remain undisturbed will commence from the 1st January, 1871, instead of last January as first proposed.

Should the question arise as to the consumption of any stores or goods belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company by the insurgents, you are authorized to inform the leaders that if the Company's government is restored, not only will there be a general amnesty granted, but in case the Company should claim the payment for such stores, the Canadian government will stand between the insurgents and all harm.<sup>7</sup>

On the same day the secretary of state for the provinces wrote Taché his official instructions and enclosed copies of the instructions issued to McDougall on September 28 and November 7, of the instructions to Vicar General Thibault, the governor-general's proclamation, the letter addressed to Donald A. Smith on November 24, and the instructions and commission to Smith. By these papers he was to see the policy of the Canadian government towards the North-West.<sup>8</sup>

The first act of Bishop Taché after he arrived in the Settlement was to consult with Thibault and De Salaberry,

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald to Taché, February 16; "Causes of Difficulties," p. 19

<sup>8</sup> Howe to Taché, February 16; B. D., p. 111

who were still in residence at St. Boniface. Then he spent two days surveying the situation. On the third day he met Riel and his council in conference and explained to them the liberal disposition of the government toward the country and the necessity of their being loyal to the crown. He felt that the first interview had produced a good result.<sup>9</sup>

The results of his investigations to that date the bishop included in a letter addressed to Joseph Howe:

The painful duty devolves upon me of communicating to His Excellency the condition of the country. I am most of all astonished at my own ignorance of the real state of affairs during my stay in Ottawa. The sight of the evils which weigh our people down and the dread of still greater evils which it may be threaten them cause one's heart to bleed. This colony, formerly so calm and so peaceful, is now given over to desolation. With the deepest regret I feel it my duty to state that, with very few exceptions, all who have come from Canada have acted as if their object was, not only to compromise the Dominion government, but also to open an unfathomable abyss.

I should deeply grieve you and might even appear to be exaggerating if I were to undertake to relate to you all that has been said or done here within the past six months. . . The following are the facts:

The letter then proceeds to outline the events and the situation as we have seen them develop. It shows an evident disposition to view sympathetically the stand of the insurgents. The letter concludes with Taché's statement of the crux of the problem:

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<sup>9</sup> "Causes of Difficulties," p. 24

The matter hinges on the conviction of the people that they cannot be forced to enter into confederation any more than the other provinces of the Dominion; that the people believe themselves in no way bound by the arrangements made with the Hudson's Bay Company: that as a consequence the words "rebels," "insurgents," "traitors," are so many insults which they repel with indignation. This is the root of the whole matter,—all the rest is merely accessory, and there exists no means of conciliation but to act in uniformity with that principle. The people cannot tolerate the idea of having been sold, and this is the explanation of their discontent, as well towards Canada for purchasing as towards the Company for their share of the transaction.<sup>10</sup>

On Sunday, March 13, Bishop Taché preached a moving sermon, in which he expressed sorrow at the disturbances which had taken place, counselled charity and forbearance, and urged united action on the part of the Catholics and Protestants for the common good.<sup>11</sup>

The following Tuesday the council of the provisional government met and adopted these motions:

1st. That we, the representatives of the inhabitants of the North-West, consider that the imperial government, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Canadian government, in stipulating for the transfer of the government to the Dominion government without first consulting, or even notifying, the people of such transfer, have entirely ignored our rights as people of the North-West Territory.

2nd. That notwithstanding the insults and sufferings borne by the people of the North-West here-

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>11</sup> Begg, A., "Journal"; p. 41

tofore, which sufferings they still endure — the loyalty of the people of the North-West towards the crown of England remains the same, provided the rights, properties, usages, and customs of the people be respected, and we feel assured that as British subjects such rights, properties, usages, and customs will undoubtedly be respected.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the provisional government made clear its stand and precluded any charge of disloyalty to the crown.

Bishop Taché consulted with the council as a whole and with the insurgent leaders separately. He impressed upon them all the sincerity of the Canadian government in their intentions of goodwill and liberality towards the people of the Territory. The bishop had a difficult task to perform. He had been instructed to promise an amnesty to the malcontents and this amnesty was to include acts which might occur before the bishop's arrival at Red River.<sup>13</sup> But no mention had been made of the possibility of bloodshed or murder. Taché thus was in a difficult position as Scott had been executed in the interval between the departure from Canada and his arrival at Red River. Nevertheless, he felt that all the leniency possible should be promised in order to induce the insurgents to lay down arms and cease opposition to Canadian authority. He felt that if promise of full and complete amnesty were not made, they would offer further resistance. This would undoubtedly entail bloodshed and disaster for the country. There is no proof that such would inevitably have happened. It is not absolutely certain that the insurgents would have opposed the coming of the troops that were despatched to Red River, but it was highly probable. Fort Garry was a fairly strong defence, its occupants controlled the Hudson's Bay Company supplies, and had

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<sup>12</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," p. 437

<sup>13</sup> v. s., p. 139

the means of coercing the other inhabitants of the Settlement; the Territory was far distant from Canada, and any troops would have difficulty in receiving reinforcements. On the other hand, Riel's followers, if faced with the need for real fighting, might have deserted him. If Bishop Taché had so counselled the Métis, there is little doubt that his influence could have induced them to return to their homes regardless of Riel's commands. It was only natural that the bishop, who was the benefactor and patron of Riel and who was the "father" of the Catholic Métis, should tend however fair and logical he might be, to arrange a lenient settlement for the Métis insurgents. Bishop Taché had been left to his own discretion. There was no opportunity of securing advice from Canada. He was obliged to act on his own judgment, and his conviction was "very strongly in favor of the idea that the proclamation (of December 6) was meant to cover all such contingencies." This assurance of amnesty was given to the insurgents, and the insurrection became a thing of the past.<sup>14</sup>

The bishop may have exceeded his rights and authority; he may have been led astray by sympathy and sentiment; he may have made a promise for the Dominion government which he was wrong in making. I do not think so. He had had a clear request and instructions from the helpless Ottawa government to pacify the people of the Territory and to offer forgiveness for past misdeeds; he was on the spot and could judge the situation; it seems he did the only thing that could have overcome the uprising. Had Bishop Taché not acted as he did, the consequences in racial hatred, warfare, destruction of property, and bloodshed might have been of untold magnitude. McTavish expressed approval of Taché's action and told the latter

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<sup>14</sup> "Causes of Difficulties," p. 25

"I think that what you have done was the only means of avoiding more difficulty and increased danger."<sup>15</sup> The Canadian government's later reversal of attitude and denial of amnesty in quibbling evasion of its responsibility was cowardly, weasling tergiversation and breach of faith with Taché and the insurgents, based on the government's fear of Ontario and Macdonald's political opportunism.

Bishop Taché by his action succeeded in proceeding on the groundwork laid by Smith and arranging a conciliation between the insurgents and the Dominion. He succeeded in pacifying the Settlement. Begg's "Journal" entries for this period noted that "Things are gradually settling down to the usual routine of affairs and more confidence is being felt amongst the people"<sup>16</sup> and "Indeed, since his (the bishop's) arrival, affairs have quieted down and there is more confidence generally among the people."<sup>17</sup> Important among Taché's deeds was his reinforcement of Smith's importunities for the release of the Canadian prisoners, and this was gradually effected.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Begg, A., "Journal;" p. 49

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### The Insurrection Subsides

The provisional government now was definitely committed to federation with Canada if the rights of the people would be guaranteed. Riel declared in council on the fifteenth of March that he would give up his place willingly and joyfully as soon as a proper governor came.<sup>1</sup> The insurgent leaders repeatedly told Bishop Taché that they never intended to rise against the Crown,<sup>2</sup> that their sole intention was to come to an understanding with the Canadian authorities previous to joining Confederation.<sup>3</sup> The council thus proceeded rapidly to work over the List of Rights and to draw up instructions for the delegates to Ottawa. On the 23rd of March, just five days after Donald A. Smith had departed from the Settlement, Père Ritchot and Alfred Scott set out for Canada, followed the next day by Judge Black. They carried commissions signed by Thomas Bunn in the name of the "President of the Provisional Government of Assiniboia in Council" and received copies of the new List of Rights and a letter of instructions.

It will be noted that the delegates were considered representatives of the provisional government, which was

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<sup>1</sup> Begg, A., *op. cit.*, p. 43

<sup>2</sup> The insurgent leaders were not strictly honest with the bishop; they had considered independence and annexation.

<sup>3</sup> "Causes of Difficulties," p. 24



expected later to consider and ratify any agreement arrived at. This expectation was never realized, for the provisional government disappeared on the arrival of the troops from Canada. It may clearly be seen with regard to the List of Rights drawn up by the council that it was materially different from the List drawn up by the convention.<sup>4</sup> The very first clause of the new list demanded provincial status. Riel thus had won his point to his own satisfaction, and this must have pleased him greatly. The demands for parliamentary representation were increased, as was the amount of subsidy asked for. No doubt on this latter point the council took advantage of Smith's statement regarding the willingness of the Canadian government to pay more than was asked for in the former List of Rights.<sup>5</sup> An important clause (19) added was the demand that all debts incurred by the provisional government be paid out of the Dominion treasury and that members of the provisional government be not held responsible for them. This undoubtedly was based on Bishop Taché's intimation of that intention of the Canadian government as conveyed in the last paragraph of Macdonald's letter to him of February 16.<sup>6</sup> A careful scrutiny of the whole List of Rights will reveal the fact that the provisional government was driving a hard bargain with the Dominion. Their demands, it may be noted parenthetically here, were in substance granted by Canada in the Manitoba Act.<sup>7</sup>

During the session of the council the following resolutions, expressing loyalty to the crown and at the same time further establishing the provisional government, were passed:

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<sup>4</sup> v. s., p. 120-3

<sup>5</sup> v. s., p. 124

<sup>6</sup> v. s., p. 140

<sup>7</sup> q. v., Oliver, E. H., op. cit., p. 964 et seq. (33 Vict., Chap. 3)

1st. That we, people of Assiniboia, without disregard to the Crown of England, under whose authority we live, have deemed it necessary for the protection of life and property and the securing of those rights and privileges which we are entitled to enjoy as British subjects, and which rights and privileges we have seen in danger, to form a provisional government, which is the only acting authority in the country; and we do hereby ordain and establish the following constitution:—

2nd. That the country hitherto known as Rupert's Land and the North-West be henceforth known and styled as Assiniboia.

3rd. That our assembly of representatives be henceforth styled the "Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia."

4th. That all legislative authority be vested in a president and legislative assembly composed of members elected by the people, and that at any future time another house called a senate shall be established when deemed necessary by the president and the legislature.

5th. That the only qualification necessary for a member of the legislative assembly be that he shall have attained the age of twenty-three years, that he shall have been a resident of Assiniboia for a term of at least five years, that he shall be a householder, and have a ratable property to the amount of £200 (pounds) sterling and that, if an alien, he shall have first taken the oath of allegiance.<sup>8</sup>

Relying on Bishop Taché's promise that the Canadian government would indemnify the Hudson's Bay Company for losses to the provisional government if the Company government were restored, and considering that discretion

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<sup>8</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," p. 478-9

had best be used at this juncture, Riel now took steps to restore the Company goods, reinstate Company business activities, and intimated a willingness to conduct the government on as near the footing of the late government as possible.<sup>9</sup> McTavish had been anxious for negotiations with the provisional government, and had written as follows to Taché:

I have not seen President Riel yet, and am anxious to know whether he is keeping off till I write him, or is just waiting till he has time to see me. Should I write to him and beg him to come and see me, as I have long made up mind on the point he and I last spoke? I know I have given him offence by asking him to come to me, and I don't want to do that. At the same time no feeling of ill-timed vanity had interfered with my asking him now. A mere hint for me to open communication with him or not will suffice. But I would prefer agreeing to the loan personally, as thought in the first instance, and I should like at the same time to speak to him about his communications for Fort Ellice and other posts. I am afraid you will have difficulty in reading this scrawl.<sup>10</sup>

Negotiations were taken up by Riel ten days later. He offered to aid the Company to resume business operations, but only on conditions which were advantageous to the provisional government:

En vue de nos pourparlers au sujet des affaires de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, dans ce pays, j'ai l'honneur de pouvoir vous assurer que mon grand désir est de rouvrir au plus tôt, dans l'intérêt de tous, un libre cours au commerce.

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<sup>9</sup> Begg, A., "Journal," p. 43

<sup>10</sup> McTavish to Tache, March 18; "Causes of Difficulties," p. 26-7

Le peuple, en se ralliant au gouvernement provisoire, dans l'unanimité de ses sentiments, nous prescrit à tous les deux notre conduite.

Le gouvernement provisoire, établi sur la justice et la raison, remplira son oeuvre.

La Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson dans ses intérêts commerciaux peut être épargnée mais cela vous regarde et ne dépend que d'elle même; j'ai eu l'honneur de vous dire que des arrangements étaient possibles, et ils le sont aux conditions suivantes.

1. Que toute la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, dans le Nord-Quest, reconnaisse le gouvernement provisoire.

2. Que vous souscriviez, au nom de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, à un emprunt du gouvernement provisoire pour la somme de £3000 sterling.

3. Que sur la demande au gouvernement provisoire dans le cas où les arrangements avec le Canada seraient entravés, vous garantissiez un supplément de 2000£ sterling à la somme surmentionnée.

4. Qu'il soit octroyé par la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson à l'administration militaire du gouvernement provisoire, pour valuer de 4,000£ en provisions de bouche et en marchandises au prix courant.

5. Que la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson remette immédiatement ses bills en circulation.

6. Que la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson se désiste d'une quantité spécifiée de marchandises que le gouvernement provisoire se réserverait, en cas d'arrangement.

En acceptant ces conditions, la Compagnie verra ouvrir ses magasins sous la protection du gouvernement provisoire. Le Fort Garry sera ouvert, tout en restant le siège du gouvernement sous une faible garde de cinquante hommes.

Voilà; Monsieur les choses que nous impose la situation. Je ne reculerai pas devant mon devoir; vous possédez le sentiment du vôtre, j'ai la confiance que votre décision sera favorable.<sup>11</sup>

In the first week of April an agreement was arrived at, Governor McTavish assenting to Riel's conditions and demands.<sup>12</sup> Keys to the warehouse were handed over to the Company. Servants of the Company were permitted to commence work at Fort Garry. By the end of the month business had been resumed, although it took some time to straighten the affairs which had been so disorganized by the insurgents. In return the Company granted the provisional government bills of exchange on London.

Meanwhile, the "New Nation" suffered a change of editors. Major Robinson had incurred the displeasure of Riel; he had printed reports of incidents such as the seizure of the Portage la Prairie party, the execution of Scott, and the council proceedings of March 15, which were unsatisfactory to the insurgent leader. He was replaced by Thomas Spence, who dismissed the annexation sentiments from the paper and began to proclaim the necessity of loyalty to the Crown and the advantage of a beneficial settlement with Canada.

Early in April Riel issued a loquacious and euphonious proclamation "To the inhabitants of the North and the North-West." It was an overture for peace and quietness. Riel was now turning definitely to another role than that of the iron-heeled dictator:

Fellow-Countrymen—You are aware, doubtless, both of the series of events which have taken place at Red River, and become accomplished facts, and of the causes which have brought them about.

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<sup>11</sup> Riel to McTavish, March 28; B. D., p. 217-8

<sup>12</sup> McTavish to Riel, April 5; B. D., p. 218

You know how we stopped and conducted back to the frontier a Governor whom Canada—an English colony like ourselves—ignoring our aspirations, and our existence as a people, forgetting the rights of nations, and our rights as British subjects—sought to impose upon us without consulting or even notifying us.

You know also, that having been abandoned by our own government, which had sold its title to this country, we saw the necessity of meeting in council and recognizing the authority of a Provisional Government, which was proclaimed on the 8th December, 1869.

After many difficulties raised against it by the partisans of Canada, and the Hudson's Bay Company, this Provisional Government is to-day master of the situation—because the whole people of the colony have felt the necessity of union and concord—because we have always professed our nationality as British subjects and because our army, though small, has always sufficed to hold high the noble standard of liberty and of country.

Not only has the Provisional Government succeeded in restoring order and pacifying the country, but it has inaugurated very advantageous negotiations with the Canadian Government, and with the Hudson's Bay Company. You will be duly informed of the results of these negotiations.

People of the North and the North-West! You have not been strangers either to the cause for which we have fought or to our affections. Distance not indifference has separated us.

Your brethren at Red River, in working out the mission which God assigned them, feel that they are not acting for themselves alone, and that if their position has given them the glory of triumph, the

victory will be valued only in so far as you share their joy and their liberty. The winning of their rights will possess value in their eyes only if you claim those rights with them.

We possess to-day, without partition, almost the half of a continent.<sup>13</sup> The expulsion or annihilation of the invaders has rendered our land natal to its children scattered throughout this vast and rich country, but united to a man—what matters distance to us since we are all brethren, and are acting for the common good!

Recognized by all classes of the people, the government reposes upon the good will and union of the inhabitants.

Its duty in officially informing you of the political changes effected among us, is to reassure you for the future. Its hope is that the people of the North will show themselves worthy of their brethren in Red River.

Still the government fears that from a misapprehension of its views, the people of the North and of the North-West, influenced by evil-intentioned strangers, may commit excesses fitted to compromise the public safety. Hence it is that the President of the Provisional Government deems it his duty to urge upon all those who desire the public good, and the prosperity of their country, to make the fact known and understood by all those half-breeds or Indians who might wish to take advantage of this so-called time of disorder to foment trouble, that the true state of public affairs is order and peace.

The government established on justice and reason will never permit disorder, and those who are guilty of it shall not go unpunished. It must not be that a

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<sup>13</sup> Note the evidence of megalomania.

few mischievous individuals should compromise the interests of the whole people.

People of the North and of the North-West! This message is a message of peace. War has long enough threatened the colony. Long enough have we been in arms to protect the country and restore order, disturbed by evil-doers and scoundrels.

Our country so happily surrounded by Providence with natural and almost insuperable barriers, invites us to unite.

After the crisis through which we have passed, all feel more than ever that they seek the same interests—that they aspire to the same rights—that they are members of the same family.

We hope that you also will feel the need of rallying round the Provisional Government to support and sustain it in its work.<sup>14</sup>

The grandiloquent language speaks loudly for Riel's inflated ego at this time. This was a busy period for him. He had demonstrated in no uncertain way the dominance of the provisional government in the Settlement: an insubordinate prisoner had been executed to show the government's authority. The council was now treating with a fully accredited commissioner from Canada. Riel had outwitted by a masterstroke, as he undoubtedly thought,<sup>15</sup> the whole people of the North-West by substituting his List of Rights for theirs,—a list which was obviously superior, and which claimed more for the North-West than the list drawn up by the convention. He had discharged the editor of the "New Nation." He had demanded and received a loan from the Hudson's Bay Company. He was master of all he could survey.

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<sup>14</sup> Begg, A., "History of the North-West," p. 482-3

<sup>15</sup> And he was apparently correct, for practically all the demands of the Métis were met in the Manitoba Bill.



Two days later came this product of Riel's pen:

Let the Assembly of twenty-eight Representatives which met on the 9th March be dear to the people of Red River; that Assembly has shown itself worthy of confidence. It has worked in union, and the members have devoted themselves to the public interests, and yielded only to the sentiments of good-will, duty, and generosity. Thanks to their noble conduct. Public authority will be employed to sustain and protect the people of the country. To-day the Government pardons all those whom political differences led astray, only for a time. Amnesty will be generously accorded to all those who will submit to the Government, and who will discountenance always dangerous gathering.<sup>16</sup> From this day forth public highways are open and the Hudson Bay Company can now resume business, and may circulate their money as of old. They pledge themselves to that course. The attention of the Government is also directed very especially to the northern part of the country, in order that trade may not receive any serious check, and that peace in the Indian districts may thereby be all the more securely maintained. The disastrous war which at one time threatened us, has left among us foes and various deplorable results, but the people feel assured of the conciliation of affairs. Having been elected by the grace of Providence and the suffrage of my fellow citizens to the highest position in the Government, I proclaim that peace reigns to-day in our midst. The Government will take every precaution to prevent this peace from being disturbed. While all is thus returning to order internally, also matters are looking favourable externally. Canada invites the Red River people to an amicable arrange-

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<sup>16</sup> Note how Riel has taken up the idea of amnesty.

ment. She offers to guarantee us our rights and to give us a place in the Confederation equal to that of any other province. It is undefined with regard to our Provincial Government. Our national laws will be based upon justice, and shall be respected. This is a happy country to have escaped the many misfortunes that were prepared for her. She recommends that old friendship which used to bind us, and by ties of same patriotism she has received them again for the sake of preserving their lives, their liberty, and their happiness. Let us remain united and we shall be happy. With strength of unity we shall attain prosperity. Oh, my fellow countrymen, without distinction of language, or without distinction of creed, keep my words in your hearts. If ever the time should unfortunately come when another division shall take place amongst us, as foreigners heretofore sought to create, that will be the signal for all the disasters which we have had the happiness to avoid. In order to prevent similar calamities the Government will treat with all the severity of the law those who dare again to compromise the public safety. It is ready to act against the disorder of parties as well as against that of individuals; but let us hope, however, that extreme measures will be unknown, and that the lessons of the past will guide us in the future.<sup>17</sup>

These proclamations were followed shortly by the hoisting of the British flag over Fort Garry. On April 20 Riel had the Union Jack replace the flag of the provisional government, despite the opposition of O'Donoghue.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> B. D., p. 160

<sup>18</sup> Begg, A., op. cit., p. 81

The Settlement now was restored to tranquillity. The "Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia" met in session which lasted until May 9 and passed a number of laws relating to the administration of Justice, property, customs duties, the post office, and liquor. These laws were to come into force on May 20.

Meanwhile, the Red River delegates had been conferring with the Canadian government.<sup>19</sup> An obstacle to negotiations had occurred immediately after their arrival in the East when Scott and Ritchot were arrested as accomplices in the murder of Thomas Scott. They had been received in Canada with a wave of indignation and hatred and only escaped with their lives by proceeding to Ottawa in a round about way through the United States. The arrest was at the instance of Scott's brother. Insufficient evidence was found for a trial, and they were released.<sup>20</sup>

The delegates were received as "delegates from the North-West," but they were not given official recognition as delegates of the provisional government.<sup>21</sup> Numerous conferences were held, and by May 3 the Manitoba Bill was drawn up and the delegates had agreed to it. The Manitoba Act was passed on May 12, and the delegates returned.

Père Ritchot was the first to arrive at Fort Garry, reaching that place on June 17. A week later a special session of the legislature was convened, and he presented the Manitoba Act and assured the members that an amnesty would be granted. The legislature "accepted" the Act, and Riel said, "Consequently, my friends, by what our delegate tells us, let us continue to maintain order, and I recommend to you peace and moderation in all your doings. I hope that very soon we shall be discharged from the heavy burden that lies upon us."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Macdonald and Cartier represented Canada.

<sup>20</sup> B. D., p. 126-9

<sup>21</sup> Macdonald's evidence in "Causes of Difficulties," p. 103

<sup>22</sup> Ritchot's evidence; *ibid.*, p. 81

It is most interesting to note that, in presenting the Act, Père Ritchot said, "I offer my sympathy to every denomination in the country and will repeat that, if there were some among us who did not dare to oppose McDougall, they were, perhaps, right."<sup>23</sup> This was a truly wily statement from the deceitful clergyman.

With the passing of the Manitoba Act and its acceptance by the representatives of the people of Red River, the demands of the people were met and the aims of the insurrection were achieved. A new government for the Settlement had been created, and there would soon be no use for the provisional government. It continued, however, to function until the latter part of August, when Colonel Wolsey approached Fort Garry with his volunteer troops.

The amnesty which Bishop Taché had promised had not been granted yet, although the bishop warned the Canadian government of the possibility of further danger if it were not granted,<sup>24</sup> and made a special journey East to insure amnesty, only to be met with evasiveness.<sup>25</sup> Almost all of the insurgents had quitted the Fort, leaving only ten or twelve behind. Advice was received that Riel and his associates had better "leave at the risk of their lives."<sup>26</sup> It was not taken, and, according to Riel's own Statement, he remained at the Fort until the last moment.<sup>27</sup> According to this account, O'Donohue supported by most of the French representatives, and O'Lone and Scott of Winnipeg urged before the arrival of the troops that messengers be despatched to meet them and enquire if they were the bearers of an amnesty, and, if they were not, to

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<sup>23</sup> Begg, A., "History of the Red River Troubles," p. 381

<sup>24</sup> Taché to Howe, June 9; "Causes of Difficulties," p. 32; and Taché to Young, July 23; *ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>25</sup> Taché's evidence, *ibid.*, p. 36 et seq.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46

<sup>27</sup> Riel, L., "Account of the Capture of Fort Garry," (Traumadan, A. H., ed.) *Can. Hist. Rev.*, vol V, p. 156 ff.

advise them not to advance. Riel steadfastly opposed such a move, and nothing was done. The insurgent leader expected the troops about the Twentieth of August. He kept a watch far outside Winnipeg, and himself did not retire to sleep until four o'clock in the morning. Scouts kept him informed of the advance of the troops, and on the night of the 23rd, being informed that Wolsey was to camp at "La Grenouillère," Riel paid a furtive visit there in company with four followers. Owing to the heavy rain Wolsey did not enter the Fort that night. As he arrived the next morning, Riel and O'Donohue were crossing the river en route to America and safety.

The Red River Insurrection was ended.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### Conclusion

In conclusion it will be well to summarize the story of the insurrection and to draw some inferences in addition to those made in the foregoing account.

The principal factors in the cause of the rebellion will have been made clear without the need of extensive repetition here. Most outstanding were the fear of the Catholic Métis of a change of rule, which dread was abetted by the Catholic Church, and the wrong means used by the Canadian government to effect the transfer. The steps taken were inconsiderate of the people who were to be added to Canada and were almost certain to arouse animosity. The government of Canada was most negligent in not taking pains to understand the conditions in the North-West and in failing to prepare the settlers for the transfer. Nothing was done to minimize the seething discontent and the animosity to Canadians and Canada.

Consequently, when McDougall came to prepare to take over the administration of the Red River district, he met with an obstinate resistance to Canadian rule. This opposition was guided by a spirited leader who was able to inspire the Métis with confidence in him, who possessed courage and resolution, and who had the ability to judge a situation and take clever advantage of it without hesitation. On the other hand, Canada was unfortunately represented by egoistic, impractical bunglers.

The rising came at a time when the Hudson's Bay Company governor was ill and could not handle the situation (assuming that he wished to) and when the approach of winter made impossible the exercise of force from Canada. Then, too, there had just been a change of government in Britain from imperialistic Conservative to mild Liberal, and the British government was in no hurry to interfere with suppressive measures.

After the insurrection commenced, certain developments complicated the situation at various intervals. The reader of the preceding account will readily have seen that on several occasions the events might have taken a quieter and more peaceful course but for unfortunate and preventable incidents. For example, during the first convention of delegates, on November 22, Riel and the French representatives barred negotiations with McDougall. Whether or not any good might have come from such negotiations is impossible of determination. Probably not, for McDougall in his frame of mind at the time would likely have demanded Riel's abdication before conference, and the meeting would have come to naught. This, however, was unknown to Riel and is no excuse for his obduracy at the time. The stubborn stand of the Métis leaders was probably due to some feeling that McDougall represented Canada and all its iniquity and that they would have nothing to do with him. Probably, too, Riel was turning over in his mind various plans and was waiting for more time to decide what would be the best course for him to take. We can conceive that he might have dreamed of ruling this region himself or negotiating with the United States. All this is in the realm of conjecture.

Outstanding among these factors was the assumption of authority by McDougall. This was done in good faith, but it was a blunder. The proclamations that he issued had no real authority, and they only served to make both him and Canada appear foolish in the eyes of the Red River

people. His commission to Dennis and the latter's warlike activities had additional reprehensible effects in accentuating the fears of the Métis and in increasing their opposition to McDougall and Canada.

Unfortunate also were the occasions when Riel chose to play the despot at times when he needed not to have done so. Such an occasion was the refusal to release the Schultz party after the formation of the provisional government in February. By this Riel broke a promise and lost the support of the English-speaking element. The Schultz attempt to guard the government stores, in itself was an egregious blunder and threatened for a time to cause a virtual civil war in the Settlement. Only the mediation of a few level-headed persons averted the impending disaster.

More unfortunate still was the rash expedition of the liberation party from Portage la Prairie, which precipitated a reign of terror in the Settlement and was an underlying cause of the final and greatest catastrophe of all, the execution of Scott. The foolishness of the Portage la Prairie expedition and the enormity of the mistake committed by Riel in having Scott killed have already been commented on.

There is no doubt that the rising of the Métis was illegal and rebellious, for in its course it brushed aside the constituted authority of the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company. Nevertheless, the verdict of history must uphold the justice of the Métis' stand and the reasoning of Riel when he asserted that "we have acted conformably to that sacred right which commands every citizen to offer energetic opposition to prevent his country being enslaved." Furthermore, if the provisional government was illegal, it was less illegal than the usurpation of authority by McDougall in proclaiming himself governor when he had no authorization, less illegal than the proceedings of



Dennis in attempting to organize a civil war, and less illegal than Boulton and his party.

As events became more serious and it became evident to the Canadian government that the resistance to Dominion authority was a determined one, Macdonald moved to activity and concentrated his intellect and power on the solution of the vexing problem. The government of Canada then began to do what they should have done long before—to conciliate the people of the North-West, to flatter them, and to assure their rights to them. This resulted in the commission of three and mission of Bishop Taché.

Most instrumental in settling the difficulties were Donald Smith and Bishop Taché. By a masterstroke Smith outwitted the clever and desperate Riel, succeeded in getting a hearing before the people themselves, and secured a delegation to Canada. From this time on the union of the North-West with Canada was practically assured. The efforts of Smith were reinforced by Taché, whose influence with the Métis and whose promise of amnesty brought the insurrection near its end. When the demands of the settlers' representatives and the insurgents themselves (in the Lists of Rights) were virtually conceded, the insurrection ended.

From this study of the causes and events of the Red River Insurrection it will be seen that it was an unfortunate affair which might easily have been averted but which was caused by mistakes on the part of the Dominion government and which, once begun, was complicated by a series of mistakes on the part of both the Canadian representatives and the insurgent leaders. The whole story makes an interesting study of men and political methods which well repays anyone who devotes his time to it.

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